



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600021623K



ARCHIE LOVELL.



ARCHIE LOVELL.

3 Nobel.

BY

MRS. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "MISS FORRESTER," "MORALS OF MAYFAIR," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1866.

[*The Right of Translation is Reserved.*]

250. 6. 319.

LONDON :
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—DURANT'S COURT	1
II.—ARCHIE PAYS HER DEBT	31
III.—IN THE SECOND COLUMN OF "THE TIMES"	67
IV.—THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM	91
V.—FAREWELLS TO LUCIA	110
VI.—"FAIS CE QUE DOIS!"	144
VII.—AWAKENING CONSCIENCE	162
VIII.—"WHERE IS SHE?"	183
IX.—"HERE!"	234
X.—ARCHIE'S OVATION	245
XI.—IN THE DARK HOUR	261
XII.—"ADVIENT QUE POURRA!"	278
XIII.—A GLIMPSE OF THE BLUE	295



ARCHIE LOVELL.

CHAPTER I.

DURANT'S COURT.

THE light of a cloudless August morning was shining upon the old house and garden down in Staffordshire. Shining with ruddy warmth upon the glistening vari-coloured tiles in which the "rose and crampette," the family badge, was worked upon the pinnacled gables: flecking with shafts of quivering brightness the grey stone mullions of the narrow windows; illuminating in amber and gold the mouldering cartouche shield upon the eastern front which told, as well as you could decipher for ivy, how the house was built by a certain Hugh Durant, in the year of grace 1570, and

where the Durant arms, lichen-grown, and stained with the weather of three hundred winters were sculptured.

August was the month of the year when the Court garden was at its zenith. Geraniums, calceolarias, verbenas, all were in their fullest blaze of colour now; nor was the sight the only sense gratified, as in too many modern gardens is the case. Far and wide across the lawns was blown the subtle, cinnamon fragrance of the cedars; clove carnations, and scented pinks were plentiful in the borders; the magnolia in the sheltered south angle of the Court was covered with blossoms that filled the air with their intoxicating sweetness—a sweetness to which the odour from peaches and nectarines in the pleached alleys close at hand was married most deliciously.

It was a garden that, once seen upon a summer morning like this, was apt to haunt, not your memory only, but your heart; as a sweet old tune does, or a fair and noble face out of one of Vandyck's pictures. Every part of it was laid out strictly in accordance with the fashion of the times

in which the house was built. There were images cut in juniper or "other garden stuffe;" little stiff yew-hedges, with occasional pyramids, statues, and fountains; spacious turf-walks, set as in the days when Bacon wrote, with burnet, wild thyme, and water-mints to perfume the air when trodden upon and crushed, and in disregardance of all those rules of modern horticulture which keep fruit and flowers distinct, fruit-trees, espaliered, were ranged on either side of most of the bordered walks.

And in its quaint antiquity, in its defiance of science and of fashion, alike, lay the potency, the human element, of its charm. Just as within the walls of Durant's Court you were overcome by inseparable associations of the men who had been born and rejoiced over, who had sorrowed and died there, so under the cedars, and in the shaded walks and alleys of the garden, you were haunted by mute memories of the youthful vows that must have been exchanged, the youthful lips that must have kissed here in the lapse of time between Elizabeth and Victoria. The love-whispers of a dozen buried generations, the roses of three hun-

dred or so dead Junes seemed to have left some lingering echo, some intangible pathetic fragrance in every nook and corner of the unchanged old place. Love was in its atmosphere! And with the August sun shining over all as it did now, the warm air rich with odours, alive with the hum of bees and voices of birds, it looked as fitting a scene as could have been found anywhere for the enactment of the first brightest act in the play of life. A fitting background to the two figures, a young man's and a girl's, who were standing together on the lawn beneath the cedars; the sun flickering down on the girl's white dress and delicate cheek as she looked up with quiet happiness, with the perfect assurance of acknowledged and requited love, into her companion's face.

For Gerald and Lucia were once more openly affianced lovers; and Lady Durant, too happy in her heart to see them so, no longer gave lectures against undue demonstrations of feeling before marriage. Ten days had passed on now since the prodigal had first returned and been forgiven; and—while Mr. Wickham, with unslacked ardour,

was pushing forward inquiries in London, and daily gaining fresh evidence in support of the case that he was working—no faintest rumour of the position in which he stood had as yet reached Gerald's own ears or to the Court. His first interview with Sir John Durant had been a characteristic one; the old man for the first five minutes vehemently declaring that unless his nephew could prove his innocence regarding Maggie Hall, he would never receive him back to his fireside or to his affection; and Gerald, with perfect firmness, but admirable courtesy and temper, declaring that he neither could nor would seek to prove one circumstance that should exonerate himself! "I have already told you, on my honour, that I am guiltless," he said, simply. "I have told you that I have had reasons impossible to explain for bearing the imputation silently hitherto, and it rests with you now, I think, to take the stigma away from me or not. Say one word, sir, and I will leave your house in five minutes and return to it if you choose no more." And Sir John, looking into his handsome face, the face that had never lied

to him during all the bygone years, had not only held out his hand to Gerald on the spot, but asked him with tears in his eyes to forgive them all for the wrong that they had done to him by their suspicions.

This was immediately after Gerald's arrival at the Court. On the very day following, Mrs. Sherborne, with her dark news of Maggie Hall's death, returned to Heathcotes; and while Lucia in the first happiness of reconciliation was wandering, her hand on Gerald's arm, through the woods and gardens of the Court, many were the whispered asides of the county world as to the opportuneness of Mr. Durant's return at this particular season, the heartlessness of Lady Durant in allowing him with such hot haste to be again the suitor of her daughter.

A woman who, at the best of times, barely tolerates the people she lives amongst, is sure of receiving pretty stringent criticism upon her actions when occasion arises. All the pottery ladies who had been snubbed—ignored, perhaps, is the juster word—by Lady Durant, felt it their duty now to

express what they, as mothers, thought with regard to her conduct. As long as Maggie Hall lived, Mr. Durant—married, or unmarried, who should say?—had been banished from the Court: on the day succeeding her death—let it be hoped a death that was fairly come by!—he appeared openly among them again, as Miss Durant's future husband. Of course, every one trusted sincerely that Mr. Durant had had no share in the unhappy girl's betrayal; still it must be confessed that things looked most suspicious against him, and that it would have been more delicate—not to say human—of Lady Durant had she allowed a little longer time to elapse before bringing him forward again in the eyes of the world at her daughter's side.

This was the outside, or neighbourly, view of the position; Lady Durant meanwhile leading her accustomed untroubled life, in happy ignorance of what was being whispered by the people who courted her bow as she drove abroad, or flocked round her carriage whenever it stopped in the village, to offer congratulations on the now openly-acknowledged engagement of her daughter. Led by

the instinct which, in a true woman's heart so seldom errs, Lady Durant had never, from the first, shared her husband's suspicions against Gerald, and the only really strong feeling she had with regard to Mrs. Sherborne's story was—its indecorum. It was, of course, impossible actually to keep from Lucia the fact of her old play-mate's death: the news told, and Lady Durant made an express request that no allusion should ever again be made to the subject in her hearing. It was about the first time in her calm, sequestered, selfish existence, that any of the grosser accidents of every-day life—passion, abandonment, despair: possibilities unrecognised by Mrs. Hannah More as ever likely to compromise the sensibility of any woman of refinement—had been thrust upon her own personal experience; and the easiest way of getting rid of the unpleasant sensations they occasioned was, obviously, not to talk about them. Poor, common, erring human nature being the one element which Lady Durant had never taken into consideration in her otherwise admirable scheme of human life; she was about as well fitted to

cope with any of its ordinary manifestations, as were the pious cloistered nuns fitted to cope with common storm and common sunshine, when the French Revolution first opened the convent doors and sent them adrift upon the world.

On one point only, kindly and charitable as she was, did the mistress of Durant's Court entertain any decided opinion in the matter, namely, that it was a very merciful thing it had pleased Providence the poor creature Maggie should have been taken. It was an awful judgment, upon herself, of course, and a solemn warning to all other young women in that condition of life; still, if a member of any good family *had* been implicated, as was supposed, in the unhappy girl's flight, it was a mercy for which that family, and, indeed, all right-thinking persons, could not be too thankful that she was "released." And when Mrs. Sherborne went away, with tear-stained face and aching heart, after the first dreaded ordeal of breaking the news at the Court, the honest woman felt duly cast down at the benignity of Providence with respect to the gentry (as contradistinguished from the lower

classes) which Lady Durant, in a lecture of an hour and a half, had pointed out to her.

"My lady spoke up beautiful," she told her husband that night; "all 'about the wicked cease from troubling,' and other texty's, Thomas; but Sir John, he cares most at heart for our poor girl's death. The tears were in Sir John's eyes, mark you, and when my lady had gone away he says to me, 'Mrs. Sherborne, be satisfied the right shall be done yet, and whoever did this thing, or caused the girl to do it, shall be brought to justice if I've any power to bring him there.' My lady's very kind and very good, but she has her feeling, you see, Thomas, as a lady, and Sir John he has his feelings as a gentleman; and nothing can be more different than the feelings of a lady and of a gentleman," added Mrs. Sherborne, "where a handsome girl like poor Maggie is concerned."

And she was right. In small domestic matters the kindly weak old man was, happily for himself, entirely under his wife's domination. In any position where he felt his honour, however remotely, to be touched he consulted no one. And honour and

justice alike called upon him to be in some sort the champion of the dead girl ; every plough-boy, every dairy-servant on his estate, being, according to the old man's stately feudal ideas, a rightful claimant upon his protection. That Gerald had been wholly innocent of taking Margaret Hall from her home, he believed now upon his soul. On whose head the guilt of her death lay, God only knew ! but had his own son lived, and Sir John Durant suspected him of being the man, he would have felt it his plain duty as a gentleman to help to bring him to justice.

It was a case simply in which every chivalrous instinct of his nature bade him take up the side of the weak against the strong. Towards the follies which men, collectively, have agreed to condone, or call by no worse name than follies, Sir John Durant's conscience was as passively elastic as are the consciences of most men who have lived their threescore years and ten on the earth. He was no Don Quixote to espouse the cause of a dairy-girl who of her own free-will had forsaken her duty, and then—following the natural law of such

matters—been forsaken in her turn. But Mrs. Sherborne's story, the vague insinuations of the newspapers, had hinted to him a far darker suspicion than that of abandoned love or broken trust; the suspicion that Margaret Hall, a lawfully-married wife, had come by her death unfairly. And quietly, and without speaking to any one in the house of what he had done, the old man wrote off at once to his London lawyer, desiring him to inquire into the circumstances of the "London Bridge case" at once, and, if need be, offer a reward in his name for the discovery of any person or persons concerned in the girl's death. "She had been accidentally identified as a farm-servant of one of his oldest tenants," he wrote, "and some suspicion seeming to rest upon the manner of her death, he felt it a kind of personal duty to encourage the fullest investigation in the matter." And the reward of 100*l.* had been duly offered and posted; and Mr. Wickham—knowing the quarter from whence it came—had prosecuted his researches with redoubled energy, duly informing Sir John Durant's lawyer

how the case was being successfully "worked," and how quiet and patience were, he believed, all that was requisite to bring home guilt to the rightful party in this mysterious affair. Every word of which intelligence was read morning after morning by Sir John at the breakfast-table, with Gerald sitting at Lucia's side, and Gerald's face and laugh making the old room bright as it had never been during the last bitter months of his estrangement from the Court.

Robert Dennison's name, as if by tacit consent, was seldom mentioned among them during this time. Once or twice old Sir John had said something about writing and making Robert come down, with Conyers, to talk over electioneering matters, and Gerald each time had remarked, in a joking tone, but with a serious face, that he should certainly go back to London for the occasion; old Conyers and Robert Dennison discussing business being something altogether out of his sphere. The days, however, passed on without Dennison either writing or making his appearance; and as it was now near the middle of


August, Sir John began to say that Robert must certainly have gone out of town—probably out of England, as usual, for the rest of the vacation—a belief which Gerald, who shrank from meeting his cousin as though he had himself been the guilty one of the two, was not slow to encourage.

As much as it was in his easy nature to despise anyone, he despised Robert Dennison now. A man might be cynical, selfish, facile-principled, and so long as he was a gentleman, so long as his failings were decently glossed over by refinement, Gerald Durant could like him still. What were the majority of the men he lived amongst, and called by the name of friends? Whether Robert Dennison had or had not been legally married to Maggie Hall, there were no present means—setting aside the evidence of those two letters he had returned to him in Morteville—of telling. Married, or not married, there could of course be little doubt as to his wearying in six weeks of the poor creature's society; and Gerald was the last man to blame another for the inconstancy of feeling which in his own case he regarded as a happy natural

infirmity, rather than an error. But would not a man of common manliness, a man possessing one of the instincts of a gentleman, have shielded all the more scrupulously from evil the helpless girl to whom love bound him no more? To win a woman from her duty was, according to Gerald's light, what many a good fellow would do under strong temptation: to tire of her—well, to tire of everything is an inseparable condition of human existence! but to refuse a woman, so won, protection while she lived; to put her away from her rightful place, if indeed he had been unfortunate enough to marry her—was the conduct of a blackguard. (A fine distinction, perhaps, but none the less real to a man educated as Gerald Durant had been.) Maggie Hall had died a forlorn wanderer upon the London streets—for with bitterest self-reproach Gerald's memory recalled to him the woman of whose face he had caught a glimpse upon the bridge, and whom, in his Sybarite shrinking from misery, he had left to perish: the woman whom Archie Lovell sought to save! He remembered how that wan face haunted him: remembered

how he had spoken of it, "the ghost of a Staffordshire face," in Dennison's chambers: remembered the tone of Dennison's voice, the cold sneer that rose upon his lips as he answered. And yet at that moment as he sat there with his friends, in his well-appointed rooms, after his excellent dinner and wines, he must have known what dark shame was in truth possible . . . the fresh face he had wooed bared to the disgrace of London gaslight! the woman who had been his love exposed to horrors of which a violent and self-sought death was the lightest!

In his own way, Gerald Durant was capable of actions that—viewed altogether from the heights—were as intrinsically wrong, perhaps, as any of Robert Dennison's; and yet, in a higher and very different degree, he felt himself as removed from the level of his cousin now, as Waters had felt himself removed from the level of his Morteville associates. For Gerald, whatever his faults, had always been, always must be, a gentleman, "*sans peur et sans reproche*." He had been brought up to think that the unstained honour of a dozen



generations, at least, of Durants had descended to him; and that every good thing of life, nay, life itself, should always be held ready for sacrifice in his hand, sooner than that one jot or one tittle of that bright inheritance should be allowed to pass away. And any man who believes himself to be a heritor by birth of what the world calls honour (or dishonour) is already far upon the road towards meriting the title by his actions. The code on which the Durant principles were framed was not by any means a transcendental or a perfect one. It was simply the very common-place, faulty, narrow code, which men of the world unquestioningly hold to embody honour. But, whatever its leniency on some points, it branded falsehood and cowardice with the brand of shame irretrievable: and in his heart, Gerald felt himself forced to acknowledge that Robert Dennison was capable of both! He had no more thought of betraying him now than he had had during all the bygone months, when his own ruin had so nearly been the price of his generosity. Robert was a poor man; and a single breath of such a story as this might

be enough to blight his professional prospects for life. Robert was Lucia's first cousin, Sir John Durant's nephew; and to sully his fair fame was in some measure to sully the fair fame of the family. He would keep his counsel; stand by him, outwardly, with the same staunchness still; only—and this Gerald felt with daily, hourly-increasing repugnance—he could never again make Dennison his companion, could never again bear to see his smooth face here at the Court, or at Lucia's side. Here, in the quiet old garden, under the dear old trees where falsehood, cowardice, dishonour, were words unknown: the trees under whose shade Robert first wooed as his wife the girl who now lay in a nameless London grave and with only darkest disgrace and shame written over her for her epitaph.

Such thoughts, joined to other personal ones by no means void of pain—for Archie Lovell was neither forgotten nor unavenged in his heart—had made Gerald a somewhat silent and spiritless lover during these early days of his renewed engagement with Lucia. At the present moment, however,

standing after an excellent breakfast in the pleasant morning air ; his admirable havanna between his lips ; the sunlight, the smell of flowers, the song of birds, the sight of Lucia herself—fresh, pure, simple as the white dress she wore—all ministering to the gratification of his keen-strung, pleasure-craving nature, every dark thought seemed very far indeed from Gerald Durant. The singularly false platitude about the inability of money to purchase enjoyment is never more false than when applied to a man like Gerald. Good horses, good wines, a good cook ; a place like the Court to live in during the shooting season ; were precisely, now that his youth was waning—at six-and-twenty!—the things which he knew himself to need. In another five years, when he should have done for ever with balls, and every other lingering folly of his youth, a favourite arm-chair at the club when he was in town ; horses that were somewhat heavier weight-carriers in the country ; and a better chef and better wines than ever, constantly. And all this lay before him in the common course of things if he married Lucia ;

and she was a very nice girl, poor little thing! fair, gentle, and feminine; and really looking her best, looking as only English girls can look now, with the morning light searching out her uncovered face and discovering no flaw thereon; and the golden sun giving her smooth dust-coloured hair a tinge of red which made it almost—almost for one passing moment—look like Archie's.

“And what sort of people are these—Lovells, did you say? these new people at the Rectory?” Gerald had been in town the last two days and had only returned to the Court late last night. “What is this Miss Lovell like who is coming here? Pretty, I hope?”

“Oh, *dear* no,” answered Miss Durant, decisively. “Not in the least. I called at the Rectory yesterday, and mamma and I both thought her quite plain. A freckled brown skin, and red hair, and large mouth, and so odd mannered. I hope you won't mind her coming, Gerald? but you know we did not expect you till this evening, and mamma is anxious I should be

friendly to the poor girl. You won't mind her now, will you?"

"Well, if she is plain, Lucia, I certainly shall not; neither mind her nor look at her. Whatever she was," he added, in answer to a certain look that he read in Miss Durant's eyes, "I should not be likely to think much of her or any one else when you are by, Lucia!" And throwing away the end of his cigar, Mr. Durant put his arm round his cousin's waist and drew her to his side.

"Oh Gerald, please, how can you! only think if mamma——"

"Mamma's jurisdiction is over," he interrupted her. "If mamma was looking through the window, as I dare say she is, I should make a point of——"

"Oh Gerald, oh please, don't!" cried Miss Durant, her fair face crimson. "Miss Lovell may be here any minute. Just think if the new rector's daughter was to see me like this!"

"Well, I suppose rector's daughters are sometimes engaged to their first cousins, and even have dim glimmerings of the fearful results of such a

position," said Gerald. "Don't be a baby, Lucia! for mercy's sake, don't be 'a baby any longer—I shall like you so much better if you are not—and now come in, and let's have some music, child. I heard you mur—— practising something out of Dinorah this morning, and I want to give you a lesson. If you leave off being a baby and learn to sing well—and you have really a very nice voice—I shall be so fond of you, Lucia."

And, his arm around her still, they went through the open French window into the drawing-room together; and then Gerald seated himself at the piano, and while Lucia looked for her music, began rambling, as his way was, from one air to another till he reached Fortunio's song which brought his thoughts back abruptly, and with singular distinctness, to Archie Lovell.

"You are always singing that thing," said Miss Durant, as she returned, her arms full of music, to his side. "I can't think why you are so fond of it. I see nothing in it at all."

"No? Perhaps you don't understand it, Lucia," answered Gerald, taking his hands away from the

keys, and sighing inwardly as he glanced at the goodly pile of songs that his beloved had brought.

"Not understand? Why I understand French as well as English. *Si vous croyez*"—Lucia's accent was very British indeed—" *que je vais dire*. If you believe that I am going to say whom I dare to love, I should not know for an empire——"

"Ah, Lucia, for pity!" interrupted Gerald, jumping up, and clasping a hand on each side of his head. "Sing, my child, sing 'Beautiful Star,' or 'Ever of Thee,' or any other of your favourites, but for heaven's sake don't meddle with mine. Never translate French again, there's a good girl. I shall be so much fonder of you, Lucia, if you don't try to translate French again."

"But did I not translate it accurately, Gerald? Was I wrong in one word? *Si vous croyez*——"

"Sing," interrupted Gerald, peremptorily—and making her sit down before the piano—"What? Oh, anything in the world that you like—this." And taking up the first song from the heap she had deposited on the top of the instrument, he opened it before her, and Lucia sang.

She had a tolerably correct ear, and a really nice voice ; and she had been taught as well as English masters in the country do teach, and when it was marked *piano* in the score she sang soft, and when *forte*, loud : and she played her accompaniments correctly ; and altogether irritated Gerald more thoroughly than any singer he had ever listened to in his life.

He had many tastes—love, pictures, books, good horses, good wines—but only one passion : and that passion was music. He could sit through the longest classical concerts—the first English guardsman, I believe, of whom the fact has been recorded—with acute unmixed enjoyment : could pass any number of hours listening to the choruses of Greek or Italian sailors, when he was yachting in the Mediterranean : could hear, with a certain pleasure even the “*belle voix fausse*,” of Theresa, herself. No music in which music was, from the highest rendering of Beethoven down to the rude choruses of half a dozen sailors, or, lower far, the songs of a café chantant, came amiss to him. He said of himself that he would rather have bad music than no

music; and, with the exception of Lucia's singing, this was true. But Lucia's singing was a thing apart: perhaps because he knew he was going to listen to it all his life. He got actually hot and irritable, when he listened to her—it was so correctly irreproachable, so utterly inexplicably void of nature, feeling, sympathy.

“Brava, brava, Lucia!” This when four consecutive modern English songs had been sung to him, without the omission of a verse, without the wrong playing of a bar; with only that subtle want in every note that caused him such intolerable suffering as he listened. “Of the songs themselves I don't think much, but you really sing them most—correctly. Now, shall we try something of a different kind—that air from Dinorah I heard you singing this morning?”

“Just as you like, but I have not near done my English songs yet. However, I can go back to them afterwards, if the rector's daughter is not here. ‘*Sei vendicati assai*;’” the Italian accent, if possible, more loyally British than the French one; “it's rather low, but Mr. Bligh thinks my lower

notes quite as good as my high ones." And then *dolce* and *piano*, and gradually *crescendo*, according to the printed directions, Miss Durant went on duly with the execution of the song.

Gerald heard her out in patient martyrdom through one verse, and into the middle of the second; then he made a sudden swoop down upon her hands, and before Miss Durant had had time to recover herself, had dispossessed her from her place at the piano and seated himself there instead.

"My dear Gerald, what is the matter?" she cried, in her little prim old-maidish way, and smoothing down the ruffled bows of blue ribbon at her wrists. "Do you really mean that I don't know that song perfect? Why, Mr. Bligh said——"

"You know it—perfectly perfect, Lucia! You sing it like a bird! only, do you see, the circumstances under which the young man in the opera sings that song, are not cheerful ones, and a little—just a little more expression—is demanded than you give to the words. If you remark now, at this particular point, we are told that the voice is to be

'suffocato dalle lagrime.' He is calling upon the woman he has lost, you know——”

“I know;” Miss Durant always knew everything; “Mr. Bligh told me, and said I attended to all the marks very carefully indeed. It’s quite absurd to take things literally in songs,” added Lucia, wisely. “I am no more choked with tears than I am ready to expire at anyone’s feet, and as Mr. Bligh says——”

“Shall I sing it to you, Lucia?” interrupted Gerald, who felt himself going mad every time Mr. Bligh’s name was mentioned; “I can’t play the accompaniment right, because, as you know, I play more than half by ear; but I really can, Lucia, if you would only believe me, show you the kind of feeling that should be thrown into the song.”

“Oh, yes, Gerald, I shall be very glad to hear you. Still I assure you, Mr.——”


But, before that horrible name could sound again, began a low, plaintive prelude—at which Miss Durant smiled pityingly, inasmuch as it was not the accompaniment written and printed, and taught to her by Mr. Bligh—a minute later and

Gerald's voice was filling the room with its rich flood of true and natural music. As he sang he forgot his little irritation against Lucia; remembered only the part into which, with all the fervour of his happy temperament, he had thrown himself in a moment; and when he reached the point at which he had interrupted her,

“Risponchia a chi t'implora,
Risponchi' o cara a me!”

Mr. Durant put his right arm round Lucia's waist, and turned his face caressingly up to hers as the soft Italian words of tenderness and despair floated from his lips.

No picture of mutual and happy love could be prettier than the one they formed at this moment: Lucia in her white dress, and with her slight figure and fair young head half bending over, half turning away from her cousin; Gerald with one hand lightly touching the keys, the other clasped round the girl's slender waist as—his lips parted, his handsome eyes softening with the passionate meaning of the music—he looked up, full and imploringly, into her face.



And the picture was not unseen. A step, unheard, had come up to the open window ; a figure, unnoticed, had stood and watched all that little love scene : and then and there—and while in very truth his imagination was addressing Archie Wilson, not Lucia Durant—died by sudden death, whatever fancy for Gerald had once existed in the heart of the woman he loved, or believed he could have loved, best on earth.

“ Miss—— Miss Lovell ! ” cried Lucia, starting away from Gerald’s arm as the figure moved at last, and a shadow falling across the pages of the song told her that they were not alone. “ I beg your pardon, but we were signing, and the time went so quickly—— ”

“ Lady Durant told me to come this way,” said a voice quietly ; a voice that seemed to send every drop of blood in his body to Gerald’s heart. “ Don’t let me interrupt you, please, unless your song is finished.”

And then, with calm and stately self-possession, the new rector’s daughter walked into the room.

Gerald had prepared himself from Lucia’s de-

scription, for a red-haired, repulsive young person of six-and-twenty; a young person carrying a basket, and requesting subscriptions, and generally speaking through her nose, and talking of the parish and the Sunday-schools. He turned round, startled by the voice, and full before him, fresher, brighter than he had ever seen her yet, stood Archie.

“ Rispondia a chi t'implora,
Rispondi' o cara a me ! ”

His prayer was answered already; but Mr. Durant did not feel near as comfortable as he had done when dying musically of despair, his arm round Lucia's waist, a minute ago.

CHAPTER II.

ARCHIE PAYS HER DEBT.

SHE was cold as ice, and received the profound bow under which Gerald sought to cover his confusion as Lucia introduced them with a dignified little bend of the neck that to Miss Durant seemed impertinent. The rector's daughter to assume a manner like this when she was being introduced to the future husband of Miss Durant of Durant !

"We had not expected Mr. Durant until this evening," she explained, as though to let the poor young person know that her being in Mr. Durant's society at all arose solely from mistake. "Would you like to take your hat off, Miss Lovell, or shall we go out a little first? You have not seen the gardens yet, I think."

"I will do whatever you like," answered Miss Lovell, still standing by the window where she had

entered, and still with the self-possession upon her face that in Lucia's sight was so unbecoming. "I shall not be able to stay more than an hour or two, so don't make any difference for me at all, please."

"Oh, but Miss Lovell, mamma invited you to spend the day. I hope——"

"Thanks. I can only stay an hour or two. My father wants me this afternoon." And Archie half turned away from the lovers, and leaning her arm—more with the gesture of a boy than of a young lady, Lucia thought—against the window frame, looked out into the garden.

Miss Durant glanced at Gerald, as though to say "Was I not right? Are we not going to be bored with this awkward, plain young woman I told you of?" and saw that a crimson flush was dyeing Mr. Durant's fair face, and that his eyes were intently fixed upon a song that, in his first bewilderment, he had caught up and was holding in his hand. Evidently he was annoyed by the girl's curt indifferent reception of him; evidently, too, he thought her ugly and repulsive, and wanted to be rid of her.

The latter consideration lent a great deal more kindness to Miss Durant's feelings towards her visitor. The poor thing had been invited to spend the day with them; came shyly, no doubt, at paying a first visit alone to the Court—and the Court to Lucia seemed much the same as the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg would seem to the Emperor of all the Russias—and now, finding herself *de trop*, offered humbly to go away again in an hour or two.

“We shall not hear of you leaving us till after luncheon, Miss Lovell, and then, if you really must go, you shall give me a promise to come and spend another day, a real long day, with me soon. Perhaps for the next hour it would be cooler in the garden than here. What do you think, Gerald? If we were to take out a book to the Pleasaunce, and you were to read to us. You are fond of poetry, Miss Lovell?”

Yes, Miss Lovell answered; not without a half smile, for the sense of the ludicrous was never far absent from Archie, and there was something in the idea of Gerald's sitting between them and read-

ing—tender love-scenes perhaps—that, indignant as she was, struck her irresistibly. Then Gerald having stammered out something incoherent about heat and shade, and very pleasant he was sure, if— if Miss Lovell liked it—Lucia ran away to get her garden-hat and parasol, and Miss Lovell and Gerald Durant found themselves alone.

Without hesitating a moment Archie took a purse from her pocket; drew out something neatly wrapped up in paper from amongst its contents, and walked up to Gerald's side. "Here is what I owe you, Mr. Durant. It is correct, I think—forty-two shillings and sixpence. I had it with me ready, thinking that possibly I might meet you here to-day."

Gerald started back from the little outstretched hand as if he had received a blow. "Miss Wilson! is it possible that you can wish to hurt me so deeply?" he exclaimed.

"I am Miss Wilson no longer, Mr. Durant," she answered, not without a ring of mournfulness in her voice. "I've never been Miss Wilson since the day I went with you to London. Papa's poverty

and his debts made us live under a false name abroad, the name you knew me by. All that is over—not to be re-called, please. Papa is rector of Hatton, and I am Miss Lovell—a very different person in everything to Archie Wilson! Forty-two shillings and sixpence—you will find it quite right, I think? My travelling expenses from Morteveille-sur-Mer to London and back, you remember.”

And as Gerald still did not hold out his hand to receive it, she laid the money down on a little work-table that stood beside her, then walked back composedly to her place beside the window.

Gerald was cut to the very quick; but he was too much a man of the world to allow himself to remain in a ridiculous position. Whatever became of the forty-two shillings and sixpence, Miss Durant's curiosity on the subject must certainly not be awakened by finding them there among her embroidery; and so, with the best grace he could, he forced himself to take the money up and put it in his pocket.

Archie's eyes triumphed as she watched him, and

something so like the days of old (of a fortnight ago) was in their expression that Gerald in a moment found himself at her side, and with her hand, whether she would or no, clasped firm in his. "Miss Lovell—Archie, forgive me!" he exclaimed in his eager impulsive way. "You don't know what my life is—you don't know how hardly I am placed—how everything is forced upon me. To have to meet you as a stranger—to be treated as you have treated me now! can any punishment, can the worst punishment I deserve, be more than this?"

His face was flushed with emotion; his lips quivered! his eyes softened and filled with passionate eagerness as he looked at her. "Say one word—tell me you forgive me, and let everything between us be as it once was!" he pleaded, clasping her unwilling hand closer in his.

"Everything as it once was!" and Archie laughed: a hard little laugh that jarred on Gerald's heart. "What do you mean by 'as it once was,' Mr. Durant? Before I went with you to London, or—but that would be going back a

very long time indeed—before the time when you were engaged to marry Miss Durant?”

“I am not talking of her at all,” he exclaimed. “I am talking only of you—asking only for your forgiveness. Will you give it me?”

“I don’t know what you mean by forgiveness,” said Archie. “I can never feel to you as I used, if you mean that. You told me when I said good-bye to you last I must leave all reckoning up of accounts until we met again, and then, if the balance was in your favour, pay you. I have paid you. Has anything more got to be said between us?”

Gerald dropped her hand in a moment, and stood silent: intently watching her face. “You will never feel for me as you used, Miss Lovell?” he said at last. “I am to take that as your final decision.”

“You may take it as you like,” she answered, quickly. “With me it is not a question of will. I could not care for you again if I tried, and I do not try.”

“Speak candidly. You detest me.”

"No, Mr. Durant, I do not."

"What then?"

"I think you acted badly to me—badly, badly!" she broke forth, her eyes lighting up, as only blue eyes can light, with sudden passion. "When you could have saved me you did not! When a word of advice from you would have made me leave you and go home, you did not speak it! If I was placed so now," she went on, bitterly, "I could save myself, I would want advice from no man; but then I was a little girl, a child, and I saw less harm in going on with you to London, than in landing alone at Calais. Tell me if what I say is true, Mr. Durant? Had I any save a child's ideas, a child's knowledge of the world, before that day I went with you to London? And now"—her voice changing with one of the sudden pathetic modulations Gerald Durant knew so well—"what am I now?"

"Your position is changed," stammered Gerald, with a rising, a guilty sense of her meaning: for until this instant his own infidelity had been the worst offence with which his conscience, or his

very long time indeed—before the time when you were engaged to marry Miss Durant?”

“I am not talking of her at all,” he exclaimed.

“I am talking only of you—asking only for your forgiveness. Will you give it me?”

“I don’t know what you mean by forgiveness,” said Archie. “I can never feel to you as I used, if you mean that. You told me when I said good-bye to you last I must leave all reckoning up of accounts until we met again, and then, if the balance was in your favour, pay you. I have paid you. Has anything more got to be said between us?”

Gerald dropped her hand in a moment, and stood silent: intently watching her face. “You will never feel for me as you used, Miss Lovell?” he said at last. “I am to take that as your final decision.”

“You may take it as you like,” she answered, quickly. “With me it is not a question of will. I could not care for you again if I tried, and I do not try.”

“Speak candidly. You detest me.”

you exaggerate the importance of a mere accident, Miss Lovell. No one was to blame—there is nothing that I can see to conceal——”

And Gerald Durant stopped with a start as the drawing-room door opened, and Miss Durant, equipped in a garden hat, a blue veil, and a parasol for her complexion, came up to his side.

“What book shall we take?” she asked, a great deal too taken up with the painful contrast that she felt existed between her own appearance and Miss Lovell’s, to remark the expression of her lover’s face. “Do you like Tennyson, Miss Lovell? Never read any of it? Fancy, Gerald, Miss Lovell has never read any of Tennyson. Then let us have something of his by all means. The ‘Idylls of the King’ is the most improving metre for reading aloud, Miss Barlow used to say.”

And, neither Gerald nor Archie offering any opinion on the subject of metres, Miss Durant took up a book from her mother’s writing-table; then with a condescending, encouraging little smile to the rector’s daughter, put her hand on her arm and led her out into the garden; Mr. Durant, who fer-

vently wished himself, or one at least of his companions, at the remotest corner of the earth just then, meekly following.

"You have not seen the Court before, Miss Lovell, I think?" said Lucia, stopping under the shade of the cedars, and turning Archie round to have the lions pointed out to her. "As you have lived so much abroad, I suppose you have never seen a house like this in your life. It was built in 1570 by one of Queen Elizabeth's courtiers, Hugh Durant. His arms, you see, together with those of his wife, Brune of Plumber, are sculptured in a cartouche shield on the pediment of the eastern front.

"Indeed!" answered Archie, putting on a look of great interest, for the expression of Gerald's face had told her already what it cost him to listen to his poor pedantic little betrothed, and she was not insensible to a certain feeling of satisfaction in his pain. "What an old family the Durants must be, if you count back as far as Queen Elizabeth."

"Queen Elizabeth!" cried Lucia, with immense animation for her. "Do you call that old?"

Gerald, Miss Lovell says we must be an old family, because we can go back to the days of Queen Elizabeth. Why, an ancestor of ours, Geraldine de Durant, accompanied William the Conqueror to England, and in the reign of Edward I. we find that the family were already settled in this parish."

"Edward I.? But I thought Sir Hugh Durant built the house in 1570?" said Archie, with the air of one humbly seeking for information.

"Certainly," answered Lucia, "certainly. You are quite right as to date. This house was first built in 1570, but we have records to show that our family lived in the parish as early as the reign of Edward I. I must caution you, however, Miss Lovell," she added, "about using the title of 'Sir.' It was not until the year 1611, that my ancestor, Francis Durant, was made a baronet. He was the seventh gentleman on whom this honour was bestowed. During the civil wars of Charles I., Sir Francis Durant was distinguished by his loyalty, which he showed by giving nearly all his money and also his two sons' lives to the king. After the death of Charles, they say he was so mortified that

he clothed himself in sackcloth, and, causing his grave to be dug some time before his death, laid himself there every Friday morning, exercising himself in divine meditation and prayer."

And then Archie took another look at Gerald's face, and her heart softened towards him as it had never done since the moment when she first made the confession of her flight to Bettina. He had behaved cruelly to her: no doubt whatever about that; had all but won her heart—such a heart as she could have given! to pin upon his sleeve for a day; and through him and his selfish weakness the worst folly of her life, a folly whose consequences might darken all her future years, had been brought about. But he was to marry Miss Durant of Durant's Court. He was to spend the remainder of his days with a woman who talked of cartouche shields, and William the Conqueror, and ancestors in sackcloth; a woman who put on a blue veil for her complexion when she walked in her own garden; a woman, ten minutes of whose society seemed to weigh on Archie as no ten hours of her life had ever done before. And her heart

softened to him. Bitter, hard, relentless as she had felt when she first heard his voice, first saw his arm around Lucia's waist, she softened to him now that she began to know Lucia herself. Whatever Gerald Durant's sins had been, his punishment, at least, would be an ample one.

"I wish I had your memory, Miss Durant. I never could remember anything, in prose, as long as what you have been telling me."

"It depends upon how one has been brought up," answered Lucia, complacently. "Travelling about, as you have, I dare say your studies have been interrupted; now, I had the same governess—Miss Barlow—for eleven years. From the very first Miss Barlow made me learn the epistle, gospel, and collect every week, and as to the kings of England——"

"Oh, Lucia, do let us go on," interrupted Gerald, impatiently, and with a horrible dread that all the kings since the Conqueror, with a dozen or so collects and epistles, would be repeated for Archie's amusement, and his own torture, on the spot. "It's all very well for you, with a hat

and veil and parasol, to stand in the broiling sun, but as I happen to have nothing on my head, and have no wish to experience a sun-stroke, I must really ask you to hurry—interesting though of course your descriptions are, Lucia dear,” he added, demurely.

And Miss Durant, who took every word in its most direct sense, and who was indeed too encased in the triple armour of self-esteem ever to suspect the existence of irony, smiled placidly at the compliment. Then, still affording historical and antiquarian information as they walked, led the way to the Pleasaunce or heath, an inclosure, which lay at the extreme verge of the Court gardens, and to which a vine-covered alley, cool even at noonday, led through the side grounds the entire distance from the house.

The Pleasaunce occupied about an acre of land—not the six acres which Bacon, with his royal disregard of space, directs. Saving in size, however, all the rules that the great philosopher laid down, had been adhered to by its original constructor, and strictly followed by all succeeding

"You might grow fairer," said Lucia, circumspectly. "No doubt you might grow fairer; but I think never fair. Miss Barlow used to say that a skin once thoroughly deteriorated can never be restored to its pristine condition."

"That's bad for me," said Archie, shaking her head. "Mr. Durant," with a mocking look at Gerald, "what do you think? Would anything ever bring my copper-coloured hands and face to what they should be?"

Miss Durant actually opened her eyes at the audacity of the question. A young girl at her first introduction to a gentleman to mention such a subject as the skin of her own hands and face! It was indelicate: positively indelicate. "I think we had better get on with the reading, Gerald," she remarked primly, and while Gerald was looking, not speaking, his answer to Archie. "That is, if Miss Lovell cares to hear it. We shall not have time to get through one of the Idylls before luncheon unless you begin at once."

"As you like," said Gerald, reluctantly; for it seemed to him just now that to sit and watch

Archie in this golden shade—yes, even with Lucia there too—was poetry sufficient. “The heat really makes one feel so lazy.”

“Oh, please read,” cried Miss Lovell, with well-acted eagerness; “please do not disappoint us. I am so very anxious to hear the Idylls.” And she took the book from Lucia, handed it over to Gerald, then composed herself with folded hands and preternatural gravity of face, to listen.

“The Idylls of the King” were about as unknown to this little outer barbarian as the tragedies of Æschylus would have been. An Idyll she imagined was probably a good deal like an elegy; as Miss Durant had selected the book, it was sure at all events to be improving and horribly dull; and, in the pass to which they had all come now, the best amusement going, perhaps, would be slyly to watch Gerald’s face as he read, listen to Miss Durant’s annotations, and occasionally offer ignorant remarks of her own the better to draw out the superior wisdom of her companions.

“You have no work with you, I see,” rema
Lucia, as Gerald turned over the pages of the book,

hesitating which of the four Idylls would be best suited to his audience ; and as she spoke she drew out a neatly-pinned roll of embroidery from her pocket. "I always think it is such a waste of time to sit out of doors or listen to reading without working."

"But I can't work," said Archie, "except mending, and that I detest, and besides I'm not clever enough to do so many things at once. To be out of doors in such a place as this, and to listen to poetry at the same time, would be quite enough for me, particularly if the poetry was very well read and the subject very appropriate !"

And she gave a half-sigh and a little significant smile towards Gerald.

Both sigh and smile, as it chanced, were intercepted by Lucia, who on the instant scrutinised, with other eyes than she had yet done, her visitor's personal appearance. Fresh, delicate, refined, the girl looked, with some quivering reflected light brightening into gold her waving chestnut hair, and with her blue eyes laughing under their black

lashes, and the white teeth gleaming from the sun-burnt face. And a prompt decision rose in Miss Durant's mind that Archie Lovell's visits should be very few and stately so long as Gerald was at the Court! Pretty she was not, nor graceful, nor well educated; but she had the sort of brusque manners, the sort of gipsy good-looks that might attract, by their mere oddity, a man so prone to be bored with everything to which he was accustomed as Gerald. And Lucia had no wish that he should be so attracted. The days of her generosity towards him were quite over, now that in her heart, and in her chilly little way, she was beginning to love him. The rector's daughter was not in the least prettier than she had thought; nay, there was something almost repellant in the juxtaposition of those blue eyes and that brown face now that you saw them close, only, only—instinctively, Lucia Durant already was afraid of her. How could she know what sort of ideas a girl brought up among foreigners might not have? how tell that these were not the manners of that horrible outer-artist world which, it is said in novels, young men do in

their hearts prefer to all the accomplishments, all the graces, of refined female society ?

“Read Elaine, Gerald, if you please. That is the Idyll I know that mamma would approve of most. Miss Lovell, don’t you think you would hear better if you were to come and sit on this side of me? You cannot catch the meaning if you are too near to the reader.”

“No, thanks, I like to be where I am,” answered Archie—Gerald had thrown himself almost at her feet on the turf—“I have just a little view through the trees of the Court, Miss Durant, and if I don’t understand the reading I can look at that and think of all the histories you were so good as to tell me. Now, Mr. Durant, please. We are all attention.”

“Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable.”

Gerald read, as he sang, with taste, with feeling; with an absence of artifice or seeking for effect that gave his reading the simple happy charm of the very highest art. After the first six lines, Archie’s imagination had taken fire: at the end of two

pages she was leaning forward, her eyes fixed on Gerald, her lips parted and tremulous ; all the beauty of that marvellous poetry lighting up her childish face with rapt and eager attention.

“Are you so wise?—you were not once so wise.”

Gerald’s voice trembled ever so slightly as he read these first words of Launcelot’s to the Queen ; and for an instant he raised his eyes to Archie’s face.

“I have lost my needle,” said Miss Durant, with cold distinctness ; “be kind enough, Gerald, to leave off reading till I have found it. Listen without working ? No, indeed ;” as Gerald, not without temper, suggested the alternative. “I should be very sorry to waste my morning in such a fashion, and as I’ve heard all the story before, I am really not so interested but that I can bear to leave off for a little. Miss Lovell, may I trouble you to rise ?”

And as the searching for a needle among moss is an affair demanding time and patience, it was ten minutes, at least, before the reading proceeded.

"You seem quite excited, Miss Lovell," Lucia remarked, glancing at Archie's animated face as Gerald took up the book again. "You must be a great admirer of poetry, I should say."

"Of *that* poetry, yes," said Archie. "I never heard anything like it before. It touches me like music!"—clasping her hands with the un-English gesture, that to her was nature—"I could sit here and listen for hours."

A remark that naturally lent fresh tenderness to Gerald's voice (and filled Miss Durant's mind with renewed and stern determinations respecting the degree of intimacy to be observed with the rector's daughter) throughout all the remainder of the reading of Elaine.

When it was over, Lucia wondered what o'clock it was; then, having satisfied her curiosity by looking at her watch, asked Gerald if his throat felt dry; and finally remarked that she had embroidered a spray and a half while he read. These were Miss Durant's commentaries after hearing the noblest poetry, read by the voice she loved, in such

a scene as this. But then, as she said, she had heard the story before.

"And you, Miss Lovell?" said Gerald, turning from Lucia to Archie; "what do you think of Elaine? She deserved a happier fate, did she not?"

"I don't know," answered Archie, with a sort of shyness on her face that Gerald had not been accustomed to see there. "I think, perhaps, to have loved Launcelot—and to die—was better than any common living for her. Would you mind, please, reading again the description of where she sees him first? I mean, after that line:—

"Won by the mellow voice before she looked."

"I thought you had a bad memory, Miss Lovell," Lucia interpolated; but Gerald, the blue eyes flattering him so pleasantly, turned back to the page and read the passage through without a word. What feeling but one could have called forth that shy, sweet blush, on the girlish face? For whom, save himself, could that feeling as yet

have stirred in Archie Lovell's heart? He read it through to the concluding lines:—

“However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient sword-cut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him with that love which was her doom.”

“Bruised, and bronzed, and seamed,” remarked Miss Durant, pinning up her embroidery, then carefully picking off every tiny morsel of dead moss or leaf from her dress, as she rose from the ground. “Well, I cannot say that Sir Launcelot would have been one of my heroes. It seems to me he only wants a broken front tooth, and a pair of high shoulders, to be exactly like old Major Seton of Ludbrooke.”

“And it seems to me,” said Gerald, somewhat indignantly, “that the story of that broken front tooth alone ought to make every woman in her heart think Major Seton a hero! A radical defect in your character, Lucia, is your incapacity for hero-worship.”

“Oh, so you have told me before,” said Miss Durant, placidly; “but really I never have been


taught to see anything admirable in the mere bulldog sort of courage men possess in common with the lower animals. Fancy, Miss Lovell, once when the boys were at Eton together, Ralph Seton, a near neighbour of yours, and my two cousins—as they were all going through the town they saw some people, dreadful common people you know, fighting, and Ralph Seton would insist upon taking part, and got a fall that nearly killed him, and one of his front teeth broken. Now, is there anything wonderfully heroic in the story?”

“Not told as you have told it, Lucia, certainly,” said Gerald, curiously watching Archie’s face meanwhile; “when you consider, however, that the ‘dreadful common people’ were a huge costermonger very nearly killing a woman, and that Ralph, a little lad of fourteen, rushed in single-handed to the rescue, it rather alters the case. I have often thought,” added Gerald, with the easy generosity that sat so gracefully upon him, “that the characters of all three of us were well brought out upon that occasion. I showed an extraordinary amount of indignant emotion—amounting even to

tears, I believe—but no more. Robert Dennison remarked, coolly, that every one probably was serving every one else richly right. Ralph, without a word, went straight to the front——”

“And got knocked to pieces for his pains,” interrupted Lucia. “Well, I never did, and I never shall, see the beauty of that sort of thing—except of course in poetry. If people have to go through the world (where, as Miss Barlow used to say, two-thirds at least of success depend on appearance), what object is there in getting yourself disfigured by fighting for dirty wicked people you don’t care about? What do you think, Miss Lovell?”

“I—I?” cried Archie; but with an effort that Gerald noticed keenly; “I think you are quite right, Miss Durant. The description of Sir Launcelot might be Ralph Seton’s word for word, and I know that Ralph always was, and always will be, a hero to me. What you and Mr. Durant have been saying now makes me like him a hundred times better—f that is possible—than I ever did before.” And she raised her face bravely, but blushing furiously still, full up to Gerald’s.



‘Their eyes met; and a new light broke suddenly upon the heart of each. On Archie flashed the truth that Ralph Seton ever since that first day in Morteville had been present in her thoughts; that she liked him, not indeed with a love to be her doom—for the passion of love was still a terra incognita to this heart of seventeen—but with a liking second only to the love she bore her father; a liking, dimly akin to Elaine’s for Launcelot; a liking that put her fancy to Gerald and for the Russian prince and Willy Montacute very much upon the same level. On Mr. Durant was forced the conviction that the heart he had been playing fast and loose with, the only woman in whose society he had ever thought he would like to spend his life, was lost! His memory went back to every little scene in which Archie had ever seemed the nearest to loving him: the time when they stood upon the moonlit terrace by the sea, the time when she found herself alone with him on London Bridge, and he knew that her face, her voice, had never softened as they did now. Had they softened for the imaginary Launcelot only, or for

Ralph Seton? Seton who, with all his fine qualities, Gerald had ever looked upon as a man altogether out of the world of love or youth? This was a detail over which, in the first angry flush of disappointment, he did not trouble himself to think. They had not softened for him. He might marry Lucia; listen to her songs; read aloud improving metres to her for the remainder of his days; and Archie—with horrible sharpness the thought stung him—would be entirely unmoved by anything he did or thought or suffered. And up to a minute ago those blue eyes, those parted lips, those little clasped soft hands had befooled him still! He had seen love hidden under the coldness of her manner—love under the passionate reproaches with which she had met him—had read to her with veiled tenderness in every word, with furtive glances at her face—believing himself Sir Launcelot, and she Elaine or Guinevere, or both, as regarded the intensity, the hopelessness, of the regard she bore to him.

He very nearly hated Archie on the spot. Vanity was by far the strongest feeling Gerald Durant


ever carried into any love affair ; and when vanity, as now, received a death-stroke there needed very little more for his love to give one fierce blaze of disgust, then smoulder (three days generally saw the whole process out) into indifference. I spoke before of French proclivities in his nature : this was one of them. The best friend living to men—the least touchy, the least paltrily vain—it was next to impossible to him to act or feel very generously towards any woman who had omitted to be in love with him. It is not quite pleasant to record in black and white ; but Gerald had such a charming way of making you see everything in his light, that you really thought none the worse of him for this or any other weakness when you were with him ; and then how much must always be laid to the account of the school in which a man has been brought up ! To Gerald, as to his compeers, a woman's heart was a stake to be won ; the more up-hill the game, the greater number of odds against him, the more exciting the contest. Lost, his own special amusement in the game over, and the bits of red and white bone

with which a successful adversary has scored his tricks at *écarté* were scarcely, according to his creed, more fitting objects for a wise man's regret. You will nearly always observe this kind of optimist philosophy to prevail among the class of men who at once cultivate love as a pastime, and study it as a science.

"Dear old Ralph!" he cried, rising hastily from the ground, and not deigning to give another glance at Archie Lovell's face. "I can imagine any woman thinking him a hero, if he is like what he used to be in the days of old. Still, Lucia," his voice growing soft and tender as he turned to her, "I don't know that I wish to have you changed in anything."

"What! not in my incapacity for hero-worship, Gerald?"

Gerald's answer was a whisper that brought the colour to Miss Durant's cheeks; and then, with more little fond murmurs passing between them, he folded her muslin scarf round her shoulders, handed her her parasol, arranged her veil round her face, and offered to carry her work-basket to the



house with most lover-like and demonstrative devotion.

"And how is it that you know Major Seton, Miss Lovell?" asked Lucia, as they were walking slowly back through the garden, and growing very much pleasanter in her tone now that Gerald's undivided attention had returned to herself. "I should not have thought you had had time yet to get acquainted even with any of your neighbours."

"Oh, we have not seen much of Major Seton here," answered Archie, turning aside her face; "he only returned from Scotland the day before yesterday, and—and—has been round to see us three or four times since—but we knew him, years ago, when I was a child in Naples. He is more than a brother to me—he is papa's best friend," she added quickly, and with an intuitive feeling that Ralph was one of the people Miss Durant would be likely to disparage.

"Ah! that will be very pleasant for you, then, to live so near him. Major Seton is an excellent sort of person, I dare say, when you know him. We have only seen him once since his return from

India, and mamma and I both thought his manners rough, but——”

“You did not understand him, I should think,” broke in Archie, bluntly. “Ralph Seton rough! Why he is the kindest—the gentlest——” but here, chancing to meet Gerald’s eyes again, she interrupted herself abruptly, stopped a moment, buried her hot face in a great branch of jessamine that hung down low across the path, and did not open her lips again till they reached the house.

“A strange unmannered kind of girl, Gerald,” said Miss Durant, when some minutes later they had said good-by to Archie at the park-gates; for no persuasion could induce her to remain longer with the lovers. “But I don’t know that there is anything really to dislike in her. How excited she got about the reading and old Major Seton! There must be something serious there, I should say, shouldn’t you?”

“Really, Lucia, I don’t know. I cannot say that I feel any special interest in the state of Miss Lovell’s feelings.”

“Ah! did you think her pretty then, Gerald, or

was she like some one you have known, or what? for I am sure you looked at her enough all the time you were in the Pleasaunce."

"She is like some one I have known," answered Gerald, "and I do not think the term 'pretty' is one I should apply to her. Will that do, Lucia?"

"I—I was afraid you did not care about her!" cried Miss Durant, looking radiant. "I mean I thought most likely you were a little bored by the poor thing—but I'm half afraid mamma will be vexed that we let her go so soon. Don't you think, now, we might ask her and Major Seton to spend the afternoon here to-morrow? If there is an attachment between them we ought to do our best to bring it about, and you know you want to see Major Seton. Croquet and high-tea upon the lawn would be pleasant, Gerald, eh?"

"Remarkably pleasant," answered Gerald, laconically, and watching the last flutter of Archie's summer dress behind the trees. "You are beginning to understand my tastes beautifully, Lucia."

"And"—after a minute's silence—"is the

person Miss Lovell reminds you of some one you care about, Gerald? I won't ask you any more."

"Some one I care about? Well, my dear Lucia, I should think you could answer that question for yourself. Is Miss Lovell in the very slightest degree like you?"

Miss Durant, with pretty consciousness of the absurdity of the question, answered no, and was satisfied.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SECOND COLUMN OF "THE TIMES."

A SOLITARY first-class passenger had alighted from the midday express that stopped by signal at Hatton; and, directed by the one porter the station possessed, was starting across the fields to Durant's Court just as Archie Lovell bade good-by to Gerald and Miss Durant at the park gates.

The sultry morning had softened into one of those silent mellow days in which English fields and woods and hedge-rows wear a pathos and a beauty all their own. A yellow sunshine, a smalt-blue heaven, seem ever somewhat of an anachronism in England. To-day, mid-August though it was, there was just that foreshadowing of change—that pallor in the sky, that haze across the reddening woods, that fitful freshness on the western wind—which gives our northern summers their

peculiar charm ; one which the glaring splendour of the south for ever lacks ; the charm of evanescence and of frailty. The coarsest, the least sympathetic man could scarcely have walked untouched among the golden fields to-day ; the fields that in another month : the sky paler, the distant woods more hectic : should be shorn and crisped by early frost—brief summer already in its grave ! Even the stranger, ordinarily a much more interested observer of green cloth than of green fields, was moved into something near akin to genuine feeling, tender memories, as he went slowly and lingeringly upon his way.

How familiar and how strange the sights and smells of English fields, the babble even of the little meadow stream beside the path, seemed to him after all these dreary years of disuse ! Years in which he had dissipated health, strength, energy—everything save the intolerable weight and tediousness of living : years in which he had played without excitement, drank without solace, roamed over the world without making a friend, and worked harder than many an honest man at his

miserable vocation without at any time seeing more than a month's dinners ahead. What a ludicrous lottery it all was!—that ever-present burthen to the thoughts of unsuccessful men—manipulating a cigarette absently, then holding it unlit between the fingers of his delicately-gloved hand. His brother, without any capacity whatever for enjoyment, but simply because there chanced to be eighteen months difference in their ages, the possessor of two or three estates of pleasant English land like this; and he, a man who could have taken intense pleasure in his shooting and his fishing and his farming, an adventurer, a frequenter of foreign cafés, a picker-up of napoleons at cards, an intimate acquaintance of the police. Everything for which his nature did not fit him! How easy it was, he thought, for elder sons to keep right! If a nice little allotment—say, even, of eighty or a hundred acres of land like this—with a good house to live in, and an income to keep it up upon, were to be assigned to him now, how honourable and straight-walking a fellow he would be to the end of his days! Failing this—well, failing

this, he must just remain what he was : the out-cast younger son of an old race, Edward Randall, *alias* Colonel Vavasour, *alias* Captain De Vere, *alias* Jemmy Waters ; obliged by the fact of being human, to eat—by the fact of being disgraced, to earn his food as he could ; and at the present moment employed on the kind of business which men even with no special pretensions to delicacy or honour would shrink from as from the last disgrace. The business of exacting hush-money out of a girl's fears, or of selling her secret to the highest bidder—her own father, or the Durants : this was simply a matter of detail—that he could find.

Captain Waters lit up his cigarette, and with a slow slouching step, very different to that airy one which he was wont to wear before watering-place spectators, walked on, miserably meditating, a little perhaps on the ignominy of his own position, but a great deal more upon the injustice of the laws of primogeniture, in the direction of Durant's Court. At a sudden turn in the path, just where the stream to which he was mechanically listening still

wound out of sight beneath a clump of alder bushes on the bank, he suddenly perceived a girl's figure approaching through a field of standing corn, not twenty yards ahead of him to the right. He stopped instantly, drew himself behind the shelter of the bushes, and watched her. It was Archie Lovell; dressed in a fresh linen suit, just as she used to be upon the Morteville sands, a bright flush upon her face, a great heap of wild flowers—field poppies, clematis, briony, dog-roses—in her arms. Prettier and more like a child than ever she looked, and altogether a picture, Captain Waters thought admiringly as she approached, breast-high among the waves of barley, and with the misty woods for background, and the pallid, golden-grey sky above her head!

He waited until she was within five or six yards from the trees under whose shade he stood, then stepped quietly into the path, taking off his hat, as he pretended, with a start of surprise, first to recognise her. The blood rushed in a moment over the girl's face and neck. She gave a hurried look on all sides, as if for escape or help—a look whose

significance was by no means lost upon Captain Waters.

"You are surprised to see me, Miss Lovell," he remarked, as in her very terror she stopped and offered him her hand; "and the surprise is mutual." He had had a letter three or four days before telling him of Mr. Lovell's departure from Morte-ville. "I had no idea that you were coming to England yet."

"We have been in England a week," stammered Archie, mortally terrified, yet with a half hope now that Captain Waters' appearance here might be unconnected with herself. "We had not meant to come so soon, but as the Rectory was standing empty, and there was nothing to keep us in Morte-ville——"

"Ah yes, very wise, I am sure," interrupted Waters, jauntily. "Very wise in any one not to stay a day longer than there was necessity for in that *gottverlassen* place. I got away earlier myself than I expected, and have been spending the last few days very pleasantly, very pleasantly indeed, with some of my people in town. I suppose you

don't know if Gerald Durant is at the Court still, Miss Lovell? I could not find him in London, so came down here on the chance of seeing him."

"Yes, he is here," answered Archie, taking renewed heart of grace at the thorough unconcern of Captain Waters' tone. "I have been spending the morning with Miss Durant," she added, "and am on my way home from the Court now."

"The Rectory is some distance off, is it not?" asked Waters, rather to gain time than because he had any interest in the parish topography. "About two miles from the Court—just a good walk—and you like Miss Durant? That is pleasant for you both; you will be nice neighbours for each other. No talk still of her being engaged to her cousin Gerald, I suppose?"

"Every talk of it, I should think," said Archie, stooping down and examining the petals of one of her wild roses. "It is all quite settled; indeed, Lady Durant has already invited us to the wedding in the autumn."


"And you believe that wedding will take place, Miss Lovell?"

"I—I—of course I believe it will," blushing hotly, at she scarcely knew what meaning in Waters' voice. "Why should it be broken off?" she asked, trying very unsuccessfully to smile and look unconcerned.

"Because— Miss Lovell, have you ever heard of Margaret Hall?"

She raised her eyes up with a sense of intense relief to Captain Waters' face. It was not to herself, then, not to her miserable secret—the secret that night and day never ceased to haunt her—that he was alluding! "I have heard the name, Captain Waters, and something of the story since we came here. But every one looks upon it as a thing of the past now. You know, of course, that Margaret Hall is dead?"

"Yes, Miss Lovell, I do. I know a good deal more than I care to know in the matter; indeed, it is on business directly connected with it that I have come down to see Gerald Durant to-day. He is—— well, I don't know that I need hesitate about telling you! If you had remained abroad I had hoped, sincerely hoped," said Waters, compas-



sionately, "that nothing of all this would have reached your ears; but as you are here, so close to Gerald and to his people, you *must* hear of it before very long, and by warning you now, it seems to me that I shall be acting fairest by you both. Gerald Durant (unknown, I verily believe, to himself) is at present in a position of the most extreme danger with regard to this girl Margaret Hall's death, and perhaps—mind, I only say perhaps—it may be in your power to be his salvation."

The flowers fell in a heap at Archie's feet: she clasped her hands together eagerly. "Mr. Durant in danger, Captain Waters, and I be of service to him? I save him?"

"Well, I believe so, Miss Lovell. I may be wrong, of course, but I believe so!" He rested his forehead an instant on his hand, and an admirably well-acted expression, half of pain, half bewilderment, came over his face. "The question is," he went on, after a minute, but looking away from her as he spoke, "would you do it?"

"Would I? Why, of course I would!" she cried, with a hearty readiness that, had Captain

Waters been learned in any subject so delicate as the intricacies of a girl's heart, might have told him what kind of regard she really bore towards Gerald. "Tell me what I can do to help him, and I will do it in a moment, gladly."

"Well, that is generous of you, Miss Lovell, very: but women are, I believe, extraordinarily generous always in these matters. Gerald Durant—really it's not an easy thing to speak about—is supposed, for reasons which you may perhaps guess, to have had an interest in the death of Margaret Hall. It took place on the night of the 2nd you know, and unless he can prove with extreme minuteness what he was doing at that time, I fancy things are likely to go pretty hard with him. Now, of course, any one who happened to be in his company on that night, might, if they chose, come forward and be of service to him. Do you understand me?"

"No, I do not," she answered, hoarsely, leaning her arm heavily against a stem of the overhanging alder, and with every tinge of colour dying on her face and lips. "I do not understand you. What

do I know of this Margaret Hall, or of her death?"

"Nothing whatever, Miss Lovell. The question rather is, do you know anything of Mr. Durant and his actions on the night when her death took place?"

"Of course I do not. What right have you to question me? You are trying to frighten me still as you did in Morteville, and you will not succeed, sir! I will tell papa and—and another friend I have the whole truth, and they will protect me from you. I think you should be ashamed to persecute me so. What have I ever done to harm you?"


Captain Waters shrugged his shoulders, then calmly took out a folded newspaper from his pocket. "You spoke to me in this—well, I won't use harsh words, in this very impetuous spirit once before, Miss Lovell, and I bore you no ill will for it. I shall bear you none now. The whole affair, as I am going to show you, is already in stronger hands than mine, and if you will take my advice you will keep your nerve, and above all your temper cool. As to consulting your friends," he

added, "I should think it would be about the very best thing you could do. Read this, please." And he opened the paper, a copy of *The Times*, and pointing out an advertisement in the second column of the first sheet, put it pleasantly into her hands.

"INFORMATION WANTED.—The lady who lent a scarlet travelling cloak to another lady on board the excursion steamer *Lord of the Isles*, somewhere between Morteville-sur-Mer and London, on the 2nd instant, is earnestly requested to send her name and address immediately to the undersigned.—S. Wickham, Lilac Court, Inspector of the City district of Police."

As Archie Lovell read the advertisement—painfully, slowly read it, with burning eyes, with a brain that seemed incapable of taking in its meaning—Waters stood silent and scanned her face narrowly. His knowledge of the case, and of Archie Lovell's possible implication in it, was necessarily confined as yet to the most meagre outlines, Mr. Wickham being far too astute a general to betray the plan of his attack to an auxiliary save on that particular point at which his assistance was required. But long experience in the lower grades of human nature, long experience in the lower

walks of intrigue—if only the intrigue brought into action in hunting down victims for the pharo or billiard table—had developed not a little quasi-professional acuteness in Captain Waters himself. During his first interview with Wickham, in spite of all his friend's flowery circumlocution, he had felt certain that legal evidence of some kind was wanted respecting Gerald Durant's actions on that second day of August when he spoke to him from the Calais pier: certain, also, that the cause for which Mr. Wickham gave him a dinner and (for Oxford Street) excellent champagne, must be an urgent one. His story, such as it was, told; and Wickham had affected to treat the whole affair as a joke, dexterously changing the conversation to completely foreign subjects before they parted. But Captain Waters perfectly well knew that the eyes of Mr. Wickham and of his satellites had watched his comings and his goings ever since; and by dint of all kind of underhand research, joined to the vague hints thrown out by the newspapers, had succeeded in constructing a theory tolerably near the truth, as to the perilous position in which



Gerald Durant stood; the kind of price that his own evidence, or opportune disappearance out of England, might hereafter command. Theories, unfortunately, however, not possessing any particular market value, the only course open to Captain Waters had, till yesterday, been to hold himself in readiness and play a waiting game. Then, suddenly the advertisement that he had read in *The Times* had given form and coherence to the whole shadowy chain of suspicion, which up to that moment his own brain alone had put together: had supplied him, too, with light as to the precise link in the evidence of which Wickham was at present in search. And on the instant Captain Waters decided to risk a first-class return-ticket to Staffordshire without delay. Into what market the knowledge of which he had to dispose should be brought: whether his price should be paid by Mr. Durant, in some Quixotic desire to save Miss Lovell, or by Miss Lovell, in some praiseworthy desire to save herself: Captain Waters, as I have said, cared little. Only as selfishness was, he held, a sounder general basis to proceed upon than

generosity; and as experience had shown him that women are more amenable to reason than men, in all cases of converting fear into money; it was as well, perhaps—this he thought now, as he stood watching the girl's terror-stricken face—that chance had thrown her, not Gerald Durant, first across his path.

"You look pale, Miss Lovell—take courage. The word 'police' is a formidable one, no doubt, to a young lady, but take courage. Everything may be hushed up yet."

"Do they know?" asked Archie, looking at him with frightened, dilated eyes, "do these people—does the man who wrote this—know where I am now?"

The simplicity of the question made a half-smile stir under Captain Waters' little blonde moustache. "Know where you are! certainly not, my dear Miss Lovell. Do you think I should be talking to you in this informal way if anything was definitely known? I see that you are bewildered and shocked—now sit down on the bank—here in the shade"—she obeyed him mechanically—"and I

will put it all before you as plainly and as briefly as I can: Mr. Gerald Durant some months ago was accused—wrongly, we will assume—of being Margaret Hall's lover, some have said her husband, and is now supposed to be implicated in some mysterious way in her death. Very well. A reward having been offered which has stimulated to the utmost the zeal of the police, inquiries have already gone so far that the whole matter is, I fear, certain to become public." She gave a start of terror at the word. "Mr. Gerald Durant will, in fact, be brought before a magistrate to give some account of himself and of his actions on the night of the 2nd. And now you will understand what I meant by saying that any one who was with him at that time might possibly come forward and save him. If it could be proved that he was in another place and in other society at ten o'clock"—he paused a moment and looked steadily in her face—"the time when this young person (so unhappily for every one connected with her) ended her life, what, in law, is called an alibi would be established, and Mr. Durant would be free."

"And what have I to do with it!" she cried, passionately. "Why must I suffer? Why must I——"

"Miss Lovell," interrupted Waters, gravely, "these are not words that I ought to allow you to speak; these are not considerations for you to discuss with me. How you will act will be for your own future consideration. The duty which, meeting you suddenly now, it has seemed thrust upon me to fulfil is simply to warn you of the position in which you are likely to be placed, and I have done it! I have done more, Miss Lovell. My evidence has already been sought—well—by a detective officer; it would be false kindness to make too light of anything now—respecting the way in which Mr. Durant left Morteville, the companion with whom I saw him at the Calais pier; and remembering the promise that I made to you in Morteville, I have managed so far to screen you. When I saw this advertisement in last night's paper, I certainly thought it right to come down here, see Gerald, poor fellow! and offer such help as I could give him at once. But meeting *you*,

Miss Lovell, has given another direction to my thoughts. Unless you bid me speak, I will remain silent still; and then, as far as I can at present see, only your own free will—or—or Mr. Durant's—can bring you into the trial or before the public at all."

Into the trial—before the public! She, Archie Lovell, who yesterday, it seemed, took her doll to her pillow with her, brought forward to tell her own shameful story before men in a public court (she had been in the courts of law in Italy, and she remembered how the lawyers jibed and how the crowd hooted the witnesses); her father disgraced; Ralph Seton's love forfeited; every happiness of her life over—and for what? Because she must save Gerald, Miss Durant's promised husband, the man whose selfish weakness had alone led her into all this labyrinth of falsehood and of wrong.

The poor little girl was far at this moment from grasping anything like the true proportions of the danger that menaced her. Vaguely she remembered how, standing by Gerald's side, she had put her cloak around the miserable woman upon the

bridge; vaguely realised that to save Gerald Durant from some mistaken suspicions that rested upon him, she would be brought forward and have to tell the story of her journey with him to London, and disgrace her father, and estrange Ralph, and all good men and women from her for ever.

"I thank you for what you have done, Captain Waters. Try to screen me still. Don't go to the Court—don't tell the Durants of this. Mr. Durant would not injure me, I think, even to help himself; but Lucia—Lady Durant—what would they care if he could be saved by our disgrace? Help me still. I have no one to help me but you." And the childish white face that looked up to him imploringly touched even Captain Waters' heart with a sensation of pity.

"I will stand by you to the last, Miss Lovell. As far as a man of honour can"—the word came trippingly from his lips—"I will stand by you even when I am upon my oath. If you still wish to tell your father, I will come with you to him at once and——"

"No, no!" she interrupted, "not to him. He

shall know nothing of all this as long as I am able to bear it alone." And then the thought of him, happy with his pictures and his poems at the Rectory, looking forward to fair years of peace and honour in his new home, overcame her, and with a convulsive sob she buried her face down between her hands.

Waters watched this outburst of emotion narrowly. Was she foolish, and vacillating, and a coward, like other women? he wondered, just as he had wondered that day upon the Morteville sands. A weak girl, who would say one thing to him and another to the next person who addressed her, and incapable alike of coming boldly forward to Gerald's rescue, or of dogged resolve in standing staunch to herself and leaving him to his fate. If she were made of materials like this, Waters thought, the sooner he gave her up and saw what was to be made out of Gerald Durant himself the better.

He was quickly re-assured of the kind of character this girl of seventeen possessed. That one convulsive sob was the first and last sign of her

weakness. She kept her tears back bravely; steadied her brain resolutely to think; went through a moment's fierce combat with every impulse of her nobler nature; then succumbed and spoke. "I don't, of course, understand all this yet"—looking up to Waters with a face of marble, with tearless eyes, and hard-set lips—"but, whatever happens, I am determined in one thing. I will *not* hurt my father. I will *not* tell that story of my going to London to save any one. Mr. Durant must help himself, as I should have to do if I was in danger. Now you understand me. What return do you expect for befriending me, Captain Waters? Money? I can get it—tell me how much—and I can get it."

He shifted about somewhat uneasily, then, "it pained him inexpressibly, he said, to accept any assistance whatever from her, but he was horribly hard up just now, all this business might put him to a great deal of expense—travelling expenses, interviews, if requisite, with lawyers, and so on—and if, say, fifty pounds or so, could be forthcoming——?"

"You shall have what I can get," she interrupted him, sullenly. "I will beg from a friend I have, and what he gives me I shall send: no more. What is your address?"

He took out a card and gave it to her; remarking, delicately, that the sooner any little assistance she could render him was sent the better; then asked if he might attend her part of the way back to her father's house. "For," he added, taking out his watch, "I have quite decided now not to see Gerald Durant. My allegiance is to you, and to you alone, and if I return at once to the station I shall be just in time to catch the next fast train to London."

"Go, then," said Archie, without offering to leave her place, "I shall not return yet. I want to be alone."

"And you will have no ill-feeling towards me, Miss Lovell, because chance has made me the bearer of this disagreeable news?"

"Why should I? You are doing what you think best for yourself, I suppose, as I do—as all the world does!" And, just touching his out-

stretched hand with her death-cold fingers, she burst into a laugh: a hollow, old-sounding laugh that even Captain Waters did not find it pleasant to listen to.

When he had walked away about half the length of the field he turned and saw her sitting still—the pale face blankly upturned, the motionless hands lying on her lap, just as he had left her. Captain Waters never more heartily wished that he was an elder son and free from the necessity of bread-winning than at this moment. Only, as money was to be made, and as he was obliged to make it, he was glad that he was able to do the girl a benefit, not an injury by his work. She was a woman worth working for and with, he thought; for—so unconquerably averse to the sense of our moral degradation are we—even this man strove to whiten himself by saying that his victim's motives were very little higher than his own! Let her good name, her worldly reputation, be at stake, and, with all her soft girlishness of manner, she would save herself—even if the ruin of the man she loved yesterday were to be the price.

"And quite right too," Captain Waters decided, as he turned and went away. "What has this fellow, Gerald Durant, done to merit her generosity?"

Little did he think where, and under what circumstances, he would see the face of Archie Lovell next.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM.

LUDBROOKE, Major Seton's place, was about three-quarters of a mile distant from the Lovells' cottage, and before Ralph had been twenty-four hours at home, it seemed just as much a matter of course that his time should be passed with them as in the happy days of seven years ago at the Villa Andreo, in Genoa. The days when every morning Archie used to wait for him, a flower ready in her hand, all a child's delicious prodigality of love upon her lips, at the broken doorway of the old Italian garden : days when his only rival was Tino ! when looking forward to the years to come, he was wont to feel the impossibility of Archie Lovell, among all the children of the world, ever deteriorating to the common standard of commonplace humanity as she grew up. She might not bloom for his wear-

ing, of course ; what was there in him to deserve a different fate to other men's ? But, whether for him or for another, the frank nature *must* keep its frankness ; the sweet lips their candour ; the honest eyes their truth. All were foresworn now—and he was haunting her steps still : thrilling if only a fold of the girl's dress touched him as she passed ; his pulse beating like a boy's whenever the blue eyes stole up to his ; a spasm of hot jealousy contracting his heart every time that Gerald Durant's name passed her lips. And still steadfastly saying to himself that the passionate folly of his life was cured ; that, following the voice of honour and of prudence alike, he had put Archie Lovell away out of his heart !

He came to the Rectory soon after noon on the day succeeding Archie's visit to the Court, and found her alone in the garden that lay in front of the cottage, working with her own hands, and with a feverish sort of energy, at cutting up the turf of the little grass-plot for future flower-beds. She threw down her spade the moment she saw Major Seton, and running up to his side, said that she

was tired and sick of work ; then stole her hand under his arm and led him in ; almost he thought with the unconscious warmth of old Italian days, to the house. The Rectory was a low-roofed, irregular cottage, all on the ground floor ; one of those often added to country parsonages wherein more space is occupied by useless closets and passages leading nowhere, than by actual living rooms ; but which, standing in its own upland garden and orchard, exposed to every wind that blew, seemed to Archie's gipsy instincts a far more congenial place to live in than Durant's Court—sequestered shade, stately cedars, and cartouche shields included. At the present moment every room, every passage of the cottage, was strewn with Mr. Lovell's newly-unpacked bric-à-brac—the thousand pounds' worth of toys that Ralph Seton's money had saved from the hammer. Dresden and Sevres, Marqueterie and Buhl, met you whichever way you turned ; and it was only by dint of much careful steerage that Archie brought Major Seton safely through to the little parlour, where the table was already spread for the Lovells' early dinner—

luncheon, as Bettina, on the strength of new ecclesiastical dignities, insisted it should now be called.

"I have an invitation for this evening for you, Miss Lovell," said Ralph, taking a tiny note from his pocket after he had stood and watched the girl for three or four minutes, as his custom was, in silence. "It came enclosed in one to me, and I thought I might as well walk over at once and see what your answer would be. I called late last night to see you—to smoke a pipe, I mean, with your father—and Mrs. Lovell told me that she had sent you to your room, ill."

"Ill!" cried Archie, throwing off her hat with a laugh, and displaying cheeks like damask-roses, eyes that an unwonted light made brilliant. "I came back from my walk flushed, as I am now, and nothing would do for Bettina, but I must go off to my bed at once. If I look a shade more sunburnt than usual, papa and Bettina, or both, are sure to think I am dying. What is this invitation about? I didn't think that any one in Staffordshire, but you, knew our name as yet." And she took the note from Major Seton's hand,

and standing close enough for him to look over with her if he chose, broke the seal, and read it through.

It was a prettily-worded invitation from Lucia Durant ; every line mathematically equi-distanced, and with neat little commas and semicolons exactly where they ought to be, expressing Lady Durant's sorrow that Miss Lovell had not stayed to luncheon yesterday, and asking her to come over to croquet and high tea that evening. If Mr. and Mrs. Lovell would accompany her, Lady Durant would be charmed ; if not, perhaps Major Seton would be Miss Lovell's escort, as they had written and asked him to join the party.

" Well," said Ralph, who had been reading, not the note, but Archie's face, " do you care to go, or would the long walk be too much for you ? "

" The long walk would not, for certain," she answered ; " but—well, Major Seton, honestly, I don't think I am very fond of Durant's Court. Something seems to stifle me there, and then, you know, lovers are *not* amusing, are they ? Gerald Durant was very well by himself, as a partner at a

Morteville ball; with Miss Durant alone, I could find something to say perhaps about her trousseau, or the bridesmaids' dresses, but together — no! How can they want me? How can Mr. Durant want any other society than his cousin's?"

"Because he does not happen to care about her, I suppose," said Ralph, drily. "Theirs is an engagement without any pretence of sentiment, as I dare say you had occasion to guess, Archie, even during your short experience of Gerald Durant in Morteville. Miss Durant likes her cousin because she has never seen any one else in her life. Gerald marries her——"

"Because she is rich," interrupted Archie, quickly. "I know, and I repeat, I don't see why they ask me to be with them so much. If they are in love with each other, they cannot want strangers. If they are not——"

"If they are not, Archie?"

"Well, they certainly won't become so through having me in their company . . . besides, it's much pleasanter at home, and there is plenty to be done in the garden, if you'll help me. I don't at

all see why you and I should trouble ourselves to make society for the Durants, when we have the choice of remaining here alone by ourselves ! ”

But Bettina, who entered the room just then, on poor Mr. Lovell's arm, stately as if she had been a bishop's wife, for the one o'clock dinner, saw the matter in a very different light. An invitation, a first invitation to Durant's Court to be refused ! The best neighbours they had : and showing such a friendly spirit—asking them already to the wedding—and everything ! Some member of the family at all events should accept ; and she had a very great mind to put on her mauve moiré and start, herself, as soon as luncheon was over : a threat that brought Archie, who shrank with nervous terror from the thought of Bettina and Gerald meeting, to instant, almost eager, submission. She would go ; she would be agreeable to Lucia ; would try, if she could, to behave like a young lady—not a boy ; would accept any invitations they gave her : everything that Bettina wished—only, let her and Major Seton go alone. And then Mrs. Lovell happily remembering that the doctor's wife had promised

to call and talk over parish business that afternoon, the matter was settled; and at three o'clock Archie stood ready by Major Seton's side at the Rectory-gate, with Bettina still calling out to her through the parlour-window, to be pleasant to everybody, and to accept all overtures of intimacy that Lady Durant and her daughter might be good enough to make.

The coolest summer path from the Rectory to Durant's Court was a footway that led through a corner of the Ludbrooke woods, then, after half a mile or so of steep and sheltered lane, fell into one of the side alleys of the old Chase: and this was the path Major Seton chose for Archie now. She was in a tumult of wild spirits as soon as she got away out of Bettina's sight, and made the woods echo with her jokes and bursts of laughter as they walked along. But Ralph knew her well enough to detect a false ring in her voice, a bitterness very unlike her old self, under all her little jests, and his heart was pained for her exceedingly. More than ever the girl's beauty and grace, and fitful winning ways, had touched his fancy to-day:

more than ever his reason bade him note how thorough, how consistent was her capacity for dissimulation: and more than ever he loved her! Loved her—so he strove to believe—with a love from which every selfish hope, every smaller jealousy, was absent. Whatever the nature of her feelings towards Gerald Durant: whether the last act in this part that she was playing should be comedy or tragedy: he, at least, would hold by her—blindly, unquestioningly! Not, perhaps, as a man would hold by the woman into whose hands he meant to entrust his own honour, but rather as a father would hold faithful to an erring child, a child whom no fault, no guilt, could ever estrange from his affection.

“You laugh too much, Archie; it pains me to hear it. I don’t think there is quite a true sound in your voice or in your laugh to-day.”

They had just reached the point where Durant’s Court was first visible among the distant trees, and Archie, in the middle of some wild childish jest or other, was laughing, a stranger would have said, with her whole heart, when Ralph spoke. She

turned to him, and the laugh died in a moment : her lips began to quiver.

"I—I don't know what you mean, Major Seton. I never used to tire you by my nonsense once, I think!"

"It was all real then, Archie. If your voice had got its old sound I could listen to your laugh for ever."

"The old sound! How can one's voice remain the same always? Doesn't life change? isn't one changed oneself? I shall be eighteen in October. How can you expect me to be a child in anything?" Saying all this quickly, passionately, and with the same quiver yet about her lips.

"Well, you are not quite a child of course, Archie," said Ralph, kindly; "but you are of an age to have a child's spirits—certainly not to need to force them as you do to-day."

"You think so? Major Seton, what do you know of my life and of my troubles—the things I have to make my heart heavy? Is our age measured by years? Bettina and papa are ten times lighter-hearted, both of them, than I."

"Poor little Archie! If I could help you I would, child—help you with my life—but you won't let me, you know. I am nothing to you now. Do you remember the old motto that I taught you, and made you hold to when you were little—the motto that you acted upon when you saved Tino from being punished for your sins? Of course you don't, though. How should you remember anything that happened all those years ago?"

"I remember it distinctly," said Archie; "a very nice motto it was—for me and Tino! but it would never fit into the lives of grown-up men and women—women especially: '*Fais ce que dois: advienne que pourra.*' A beautiful maxim! '*Fais ce que dois:*' easy to follow if other people did the same; but they don't; and one's life is mixed up with other lives, and what we do comes from other people, not from ourselves. If each of us lived in a desert, your motto would be an admirable one; but we don't live in deserts—I don't, at least—and I can't do what is right, and I care a great deal—sometimes I am told

my first duty is to care—for what follows.

Allez!”

She snatched off a great head of foxglove from the hedge, and began plucking it to pieces as she walked; throwing away flower after flower with a certain restless gesture of the hand that Ralph remembered was always the sign of some unusual emotion in her when she was a child.

“And I can’t even advise you, Archie, then?” Never had he admired her more than at this moment: her fresh lips playing at scepticism and sophistry; the scoffing, defiant look upon her soft child’s face. Never had she more recalled to him the days when he believed that the germ of every fair and noble quality was latent in Archie Lovell’s heart. “There is nothing you will let me do for you?”

“In the way of advice, nothing. Advice never did me any good: it never will. Now, if—if—” she hesitated an instant; then shot a quick glance up into Ralph’s face, “I hate to say this, Major Seton, when I think of all you have done for us, but I have no one to go to but you—I asked Bettina in

a roundabout way this morning, and she told me we had not five pounds in the house—if you could lend me some money, fifty pounds say, you would help me infinitely! help me, ah, so that I could never repay you while I live!” And she came close to him, and suddenly put up her hand, all in a tremble, on his arm.

The touch thrilled through every fibre of Ralph Seton's heart. “I wish you had asked me for anything else, Archie, by Heaven, I do! What do you want money for? Tell me everything you desire in the world, and let me—oh, child, let me have the foolish pleasure of giving it you—but money! You, at your age, to want money!” And for an instant the sickening suspicion that her father must have tutored her into asking this overcame him.

“Well, you have only to refuse me,” said Archie, quietly; “but her face blanched at the thought of his refusal. “It is not to spend upon myself; it is not for anything I can tell papa about. I am in a great trouble—a trouble where only money can help me, and I thought perhaps you

would have lent me some. I will speak of it no more "Ralph, dear Ralph!" half repentant, half cajoling, and looking up at him with eyes unused to denial, "you have sacrificed enough for us already, I am sure!"

And upon this Major Seton straightway did what many another stern, high-principled man would have done, perhaps, with a soft hand weighting his arm, blue eyes imploring to him through unshed tears—succumbed utterly; promised to write out a cheque for fifty pounds—a hundred pounds—whenever Archie wished; to ask her no question, direct or indirect, about the way in which it pleased her to spend it; but to stand—for this she pleaded to him wistfully—to stand by her and aid her in every difficulty of her life, now and always. Then he took her hand, and, raising it reverently, held it long—poor little trembling hand that it was—to his lips. This was part of his system, doubtless, for his folly's cure: part of his system for putting the girl away out of his heart.

They found Lucia and Gerald already out on

the lawn, pretending, in a lover-like fashion, to play croquet, when they arrived. Miss Durant, in her little affable way, assigned Archie and Major Seton to be partners at once; and the match was soon going on as gaily as though no heart out of the four were burthened by fear or jealousy—as calmly as though no storm, which might for ever wreck the lives of all, were already dark upon the horizon! Won by the irresistible frankness of Gerald's manner, the hearty grasp of his hand when they met, Ralph Seton found it impossible, after the first five minutes were over, to treat him either with coldness or distrust. Indeed, as the day wore on, and as he marked Gerald's thoroughly unconcerned manner towards Archie, his devotion to Lucia; marked, too—could he fail to mark?—the conscious blush that ever and anon rose upon Archie Lovell's face when, by chance, her eyes met his own; it began to dawn upon the mind of the old Moustache that a good many of his severest foregone resolutions were somewhat transcendental ones. Through folly or through accident, this girl and this man had once spent eight or ten hours

of a summer's day—scarcely more than indifferent acquaintance spend at a pic-nic or a yachting party—together; and neither caring for the other, and the world happily knowing nothing of that foolish chance each with honour would marry and be happy apart, some day look back and speak with calmness of that accidental half-liking of the past. Archie had spoken falsely to him in Morteville, certainly; ay—but how fair she looked, bare-headed beneath the cedar shade, the cool light playing on her white dress, her bright hair clustering round her neck, her slender figure girlishly, innocently free in every new attitude, as she flitted across the grass. She had been false—was false still. But something must ever be forgiven in what we love; and marvellously easy, it would be, he thought, to forgive her anything! And with an instinctive, a growing consciousness of why Major Seton watched her so steadfastly, Archie, all her forced spirits gone, was soft, quiet, womanly, as she had never been till to-day: soft and womanly to an extent that occasionally gave Gerald's heart a very sore pang yet; and even made Lucia con-

fess to him, aside, that, with training and attention, and care of her complexion, the rector's daughter might possibly yet become "nice-looking than otherwise."

When their match was over, Major Seton and Archie shamefully defeated, high tea—as dinner, if eaten cold or at an earlier hour than usual, must now be called—was served to them upon the lawn. Archie sat by Sir John Durant, charming him, as that sunny face and laugh of hers always charmed old people, and long before the meal was over had begun to confess to herself that the air of Durant's Court, the presence even of the lovers themselves, no longer stifled her. A welcome sense of peace and protection came over her as she looked at Sir John and Lady Durant, at the stately old house, the hemmed-in gardens, the grave grey-headed butler standing erect and impassive behind his master's chair. Impossible, she thought, that vulgar, noisy trouble, the scandal of a public exposure, could be coming near a place so sheltered, near people so separated from the outer world as these. What was there to prove that Captain

Waters' story had a word of truth in it? Might he not himself have put that notice in the paper? Would such a man hesitate as to means where money was to be extorted? And she had been weak, cowardly enough to take all his threats at their full worth! Lucky that it had been out of her power to send him off the money at once. She would make fullest confession, she thought, as she walked home with Ralph to-night; would throw herself upon his pity; ask him to save her from the possibility of Captain Waters' further persecution; and then—then bright vistas of a peaceful future floated, rose-coloured, before Archie's mind! Her father happy with his pictures, Bettina with the parish, and she and Ralph fast friends, not a shadow of distrust between them, and in time, perhaps, long after Gerald and Lucia were married——

At this point of her meditation—Ralph was watching her downcast face just then, thinking how pure, how childlike, how untainted by a touch of falsehood, that face was—one of the under-servants of the Court came across the lawn from

the house, and, beckoning the butler mysteriously aside, said a few words in his ear. The old man at first shook his head, as though protesting against the indecorum of the message, whatever it was, that had been delivered to him; then, after a minute's consultation, returned behind his master's chair, and bending low, told him, in a whisper, that a person from London desired to see him without delay—a person on most important business, of the name of Wickham.

The word, whispered though it was, fell full on Archie Lovell's ear. Another instant, and her face—that innocent face that Ralph was watching so tenderly—had grown white as ashes.

CHAPTER V.

FAREWELLS TO LUCIA.

MR. WICKHAM stood quietly waiting for the servant's return in the great hall of the Court; and as he waited he took a brief mental inventory of all the different objects by which he was surrounded. The dark groined roof—not used to shelter men of his particular class—the armour in which the Durants of old had tilted, and sometimes bled to death for honour; the coats of arms upon the painted windows; the glimpse through the open door of the garden, lying peaceful in the rosy evening flush, and of the little party beneath the cedars, Mr. Wickham took note of all: professionally, mechanically, with a view to possible contingencies, without any sense of triumph or of pity; simply as he would have taken note of the squalid

furniture in that waterside tavern to which he conducted Mrs. Sherborne on the day succeeding Margaret Hall's death.

Sir John Durant would see him in a few minutes, the servant brought in word; Sir John was at present finishing dinner with some friends on the lawn, if the gentleman would walk into the library? So into the library, with his peculiar, stealthy, noiseless tread, the gentleman walked (taking more notes on his way); and there, upright, unmoved, just as it chanced under the mournful-eyed portrait of Sir Francis Durant—the cavalier who was wont to lay himself in his coffin in memory of the martyred king—stood and waited for the present master of the Court: the old man whose pride, whose name, it was his mission to bring lower than the pride, the name, of any Durant since the Conquest had ever yet been brought!

Sir John came in with his accustomed courteous, blandly-condescending air; seated himself by the open window, from whence he could still see Gerald at Lucia's side, and signed graciously to Mr. Wickham that he might take a chair.

"You have come to see me on business, Mr. —?"

"Wickham, Sir John Durant. Inspector Wickham," put in the visitor, deferentially, and remaining standing still.

"Mr. Wickham—ah, yes, I did not quite catch the name. Some communication from Conyers Brothers, of Lincoln's Inn, I suppose?"

Mr. Wickham gave an apologetic half-cough, and raised the back of his hand to his mouth. "Mr. Conyers was the party, I understand, Sir John Durant, who first opened your offer to our people, but my business is not connected with that in any way—payment of course never being made in these cases until the information sought for has been brought to proof. I have come down to-day on a mission of a remarkably grave nature, and—the circumstances being unusually delicate ones—it seems to me a duty"—on the strength of addressing a baronet, Mr. Wickham made his sentences as long and as inverted as he could—"a painful duty, Sir John Durant, to put you in possession of some of

the leading facts my inquiries have brought to light before proceeding to execute it."

"Ah, yes, I'm much obliged to you for your attention, I am sure." And Sir John, always sleepy after dinner, gave a half-yawn as he spoke. If you really *don't* think Conyers would have done as well? I have a great dislike to business, and—and all painful subjects, and I am sure I shall gladly pay the hundred pounds (something has been discovered you say?) to know that the thing is set at rest. It has been a very harassing occurrence to me, Mr. Wickham, very." And Sir John drew out his spectacles, wiped them, adjusted them on his nose, and looked imploringly at his visitor, as much as to say, "Pray be brief, my good Mr. Wickham; you are an excellent person, no doubt, and have done everything that excellent persons of your class are usually paid to do in these matters, and I'm ready to glance at any distressing documents you may have with you, or sign you a cheque: anything to get rid of you, and of all other unpleasant subjects as briefly as possible!" And Mr. Wickham, no bad interpreter of expression,

saw at a glance with what kind of human creature he had to deal. Durant's Court was not the only old house with an unsullied name and an ancestry dating back to William the Conqueror into which his professional duties had been the means of bringing him.

"I am sorry, Sir John Durant—ahem! very sorry—to say that my communication cannot be told in six words. This is a matter of no common importance, sir, and I think perhaps it would be as well to have a third party present during our conversation."

Sir John bowed resignedly. "Whatever you think necessary—only, really, if Conyers *could* have done it all—and another person present, you say! Now is that necessary, Mr. Wickham? It was my duty of course to see that these inquiries were made—a very good girl, poor thing! the Sherbornes most respected tenants of ours for generations past—and it has been your duty to make them—but why should we pain another person by compelling him to listen to any of the harrowing details you have collected? Why should we, Mr. Wickham?"

"Well, Sir John Durant," answered Mr. Wickham, with a little abrupt shift from his upright posture. "You being, as I hear, a magistrate, don't need to be told that there's a form in all these things—a form that it's just as well to attend to. I'm placed by my duty in a position where it's best for all parties to be plain spoken, and I hope you'll say hereafter I conducted everything honourable and above-board. Mr. Gerald Durant is, I believe, staying in this house? Well, I understood so—I understood so—and if I may make so free as to offer an opinion, I should say that Mr. Gerald Durant is the gentleman who ought to be present at our conversation."

"Dear me—well, now, I cannot see that!" cried Sir John. "What earthly difference can it make whether two people or one has to bore himself—I beg your pardon, to go through all this very distressing business?—however, of course you know best. May I ask you to have the goodness to touch that bell?—thank you, I have been rather helpless, Mr. Wickham, since my last

attack of gout, and I feel every change in the weather. We are going to have rain now, I'm afraid. The harvest has been getting on very well hitherto." Making these little remarks in the affably familiar tone he always employed towards his inferiors. "A great deal is in round us already, and we are not generally an early county."

Mr. Wickham was deferentially interested. Being a Londoner himself he was not much of a hand at such things, but seemed to think the crops looked forward, certainly, as he came down by the train. After this, a servant having meanwhile entered and been told to request Mr. Gerald Durant's presence in the library, there was a pause. Sir John helped himself to a pinch of snuff from his gold snuff-box, and turned his face again towards the window (very handsome the kindly weak old face looked in the sinking light); Mr. Wickham stood respectfully in the background still: the hard features immovable, expressionless as ever: the keen eyes adding more and more items to that professional inventory which his

unresting brain was never wearied of drawing out. In five or six minutes' time Gerald Durant entered the room.

"Here is my nephew, Mr. Gerald Durant," said Sir John. "Gerald, this is Mr. Wickham—Inspector Wickham, you know, whom Conyers got to inquire about poor Maggie Hall, and we thought you might as well be present to hear how it is all settled. I wrote to Conyers a week or two back—didn't I tell you?—offering a reward if anything could be discovered about the way she came by her death, poor soul, and——"

But the old man's hazy talk was brought to a sudden stop before the look of Gerald's face. He had, I have said before, a complexion which flushed and faded like a girl's under any strong emotion; at this moment the blood rushed violently to his temples, then ebbed away and left him a pale ashen hue, very painful to witness. "You—you offered a reward, sir!" he exclaimed, his voice shaken with agitation; for now that the police had been at work, could he doubt *what* story he had been summoned here to listen to? could he doubt

that the shame of Robert Dennison's marriage—the treble shame of his having deserted his wife, was to become public? “No, you did not tell me of this before. I wish to heaven you had!” he added bitterly.

Up to this moment he had scarcely noticed Wickham, who was still keeping respectfully aloof in the background; as he turned impatiently from his uncle now, his eyes fell full upon the detective's face, and then Mr. Wickham came half a step forward, and after giving another of his small coughs of apology spoke:

“My duty is a painful one, Mr. Gerald Durant, but I wish to discharge it as delicately and as fairly as possible, and I warn you, sir, that anything you say now may hereafter be brought up to your detriment. I have no wish—there is no necessity,” he added with emphasis, “for me to employ subterfuge of any kind. I am an officer of detective police. I have been employed by the authorities to investigate the circumstances connected with Margaret Hall's death, on the second instant, and I warn you again, Mr. Durant, that anything you

nowsay may hereafter be made use of to your disadvantage."

"And why the deuce, sir, should we require this, or any other warning of yours?" cried Gerald, hotly. "Sir John Durant has offered a sum of money for the discovery of certain circumstances. You, it appears, have discovered them, and have come to claim your reward. What can we possibly have to say at all in such a matter? You have to speak, and we to listen, I think, sir." And drawing up a chair, Gerald took his place at Sir John Durant's side. Only too clearly he foresaw the cruel blow the chivalrous old man was about to receive; and his blood rose at the thought that already a man like this was treating them half with pity; warning them to say nothing that could hereafter be used against themselves! They, the Durants of Durant, warned not to betray their complicity with the guilty husband and betrayer—their own flesh and blood—of Margaret Hall the dairy-maid!

"I made use of a form only," said Wickham, suavely—accurately calculating, meanwhile, the

precise angle which Gerald occupied between the window and the spot where he himself stood. "There is, as Mr. Gerald Durant says, no necessity for the warning in this particular instance, but there are formulas that we are instructed to follow in every case of ar—of criminal procedure, and I adhered to duty in giving it. I have now, Sir John Durant, to lay before you briefly the results of my search in this matter. If they lead to a most unlooked-for conclusion, if they fix the guilt upon parties the least suspected by yourself, you will, I hope, be in some measure prepared for the shock. I have been placed in positions of this kind before—often before," said Mr. Wickham, with honourable pride; "and I have always found, if I may be excused the remark, that the higher born a gentleman is, the better he bears any painful or unexpected disclosure; even a disclosure," lowering and concentrating his voice, and moving a stealthy step or two in advance, "that may darkly affect his honour and the honour of his family."

Gerald passed his hand with irrepressible im-

patience across his face: old Sir John gave a puzzled benign look of inquiry at Wickham.

"This extreme delicacy does you credit, Mr. Wickham, still I cannot but think you over-estimate our interest in the case. The girl was a good girl, poor thing! the servant of one of my tenant-farmers, you understand—nothing more."

Mr. Wickham bowed; and looking down, traced out, for a second or two, one of the patterns on the carpet with his foot. He felt as assured now of the old man's utter ignorance as of Gerald's guilt, and it seemed to him that the shortest way of finishing what he had come to accomplish would be the most merciful; he also wanted to return by the seven-forty train to London.

"On the night of the second instant, Sir John Durant"—taking a note-book from his pocket, and occasionally glancing at it, but more for form's sake than because his memory required artificial aid as he spoke—"the body of a woman was, as you know, found in the Thames, a little below London Bridge. From the first, and although nothing material was brought to light at the in-

quest, some suspicions of foul play were entertained among our people, and I was entrusted with the further management of the case. It has proved as difficult a one, sir, as was ever worked; but no stone has been left unturned—although I say so—in working it; and bit by bit, as I am about to show, every portion of the requisite evidence has come into my hands. The story, shortly put, comes to this: Margaret Hall, seven months ago, eloped from her employer's house, here in Staffordshire, with a gentleman (whom at present I need not name), and, to the best of my belief, though of this I have no absolute proof, became his wife." Gerald gave a sigh of relief. Discovery had not, after all, gone so far, perhaps, as he had dreaded. "On the second of August, Sir John Durant, this gentleman returned from France, accompanied by a lady—we may say, for shortness, by his wife—and arrived with her in town, as I have evidence to show, at about eight o'clock in the evening. They came direct from Morteveille-sur-Mer to London, and the name of the excursion steamer that brought them was the Lord of the

Isles. A man called Randall, better known among our people by the name of Waters, saw them on board together from the Calais pier; the gentleman's own servant, reluctantly, as is natural, is witness to the same; and, lastly, a lady who was one of their fellow-passengers swears to a travelling cloak she lent the young woman in the course of the voyage, and which, in the hurry of landing, or some other cause, was not returned to its owner. Well, sir, the gentleman (whom at present I need not call by name) was next seen with his companion by one of our officers on London Bridge, at a few minutes before ten o'clock that night; and here, as throughout, not a shadow of doubt rests upon the accuracy of the evidence, the officer, under my directions, having watched the gentleman at his town lodgings, not three days ago, and sworn positively to his identity. The girl was at this time dressed, it is remembered, in a scarlet travelling cloak; the gentleman was standing, no hat on, and his coat torn, by her side. Whether a quarrel had taken place between them already is a matter of surmise. There had been a disturbance

shortly before on the bridge, which, it is suggested, may account for the state of the gentleman's dress. Something unusual, at all events, about their appearance and manner made the officer watch them narrowly before proceeding on his beat. It was now, you will remark, near upon ten o'clock; a quarter of an hour only before the time when a woman's shriek was heard, and a body seen to fall from the bridge. An hour or so later, the gentleman went alone to the house of a relation, excited in manner, and disordered in his dress, and when joked with about his appearance, volunteered the singular statement that he had seen the ghost of an old friend's face—"the ghost of a Staffordshire face"—on London Bridge that night. Some hours afterwards the body of a female was found drowned in the river, dressed in the scarlet cloak since identified, a handkerchief marked with initials corresponding to the name of the suspected party in her breast. The body was recognised and sworn to by Martha Sherborne, on the afternoon of the inquest, as that of her late dairy servant, Margaret Hall." And here Mr. Wickham paused.

"And what does all this prove?" cried Sir John, a nervous tremor in his voice. "I am a magistrate, Mr. Wickham, I understand law myself, and I don't see that these facts, supposing them all to be established, go to prove that the girl came by her death unfairly. If they point to anything, it is to what we have suspected from the first—suicide."

"That is a question for the lawyers," answered Wickham, with excessive gravity. "I make no accusation, I seek to establish nothing. My duty has been to search for facts alone. These facts having been considered conclusive, a warrant has been granted for the apprehension of the person who was Margaret Hall's companion on the night of her death, and my duty here is to carry that warrant into effect."

"Here!" exclaimed old Sir John, a deep red flushing over his face as he got up slowly from his chair. "You are misinformed, Mr. Wickham, or you are carrying some mistaken sense of duty too far. What apprehension can you possibly have to execute in my house?"

"I have to arrest the person of Margaret Hall's companion," said Wickham, with increasing firmness, and producing a paper from his pocket. "You are a magistrate, Sir John Durant, and I look to you to help rather than hinder me in my duty—painful though it may be?"

"And that person?" faltered Sir John, with whitening lips, as a new and awful suspicion overcame him.

"That person," answered Wickham, "is now, I regret to say, before you. Mr. Durant," coming across the room in a second, and laying a heavy hand on Gerald's shoulder, "I arrest you on the charge of having caused, or been party to, the death of Margaret Hall, on the night of August the second. You must consider yourself my prisoner, sir, and you will be pleased to accompany me back to London by the seven-forty train to-night."

Gerald had been sitting till this minute with his hands tightly pressed across his eyes. He started to his feet in a second at Wickham's touch, and as his hand dropped from his face, both of the men who were watching him felt literally startled by

the calmness of its expression. I imagine most innocent men or women would look to the full as guilty as really criminal ones in the first stunned moment of an unjust accusation; guilty or innocent, the majority of human cheeks would certainly blanch—the majority of human nerves falter at such a moment as this! But Gerald Durant's face kept just as calm as it had been half an hour before, when he was whispering soft nothings to Lucia under the cedar-trees on the lawn. "Blood tells," thought Wickham, proud of the verification of his theory. "Evidence enough against him to hang a bishop, and he ups after his arrest, as cool as a cucumber, and with a face like this. Fine family—fine spirit! Pleasure to a man to have his duty lie with real gentleman who can act as such!" And possibly Mr. Wickham was right. Possibly it *was* his blood, the inherited instincts of a gentle race, that upheld Gerald at this moment. Robert Dennison, the manufacturer's son, could confront personal danger with the strength, the sheer animal courage, of a lion. Gerald could do more: he could confront disgrace sooner than be-

tray a trust: could confront it with the carelessness of a cavalier dying for his worthless king, the grace of a French marquis arranging his necktie, and smiling adieux to his friends, upon his way to the tumbril! As Wickham told his story—from the moment when the word Morteville first turned suspicion aside from Robert to the last—Gerald had followed him calmly and minutely, his quick imagination supplying a hundred links that in Wickham's purposely short account were wanting; and, long before the heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, had realized the position in which he stood, the very plain and straightforward path that lay before him. To whatever pass this extraordinary chain of accidents might lead, a double trust must, he felt, seal his lips from speaking one solitary word of self-defence. By disclosing what he knew of Robert's marriage, he might possibly clear himself—and present to the world the chivalrous spectacle of a Durant striving to shift danger from his own shoulders to that of another member of his family. By bringing forward Archie Lovell he could, for very certain, reduce the whole accusation

to an absurdity: save his own at the price of a woman's reputation. And the temptation, the conflict, that might have assailed many a man, equally honest, but of different race, never really for a moment came near Gerald Durant. He was placed awkwardly—simply that: and before his uncle, and before this man whose heavy hand was on his shoulder alike, must give not a sign, say not a word, that could by possibility criminate the two persons his honour bade him shield. How things would probably end as regarded himself was a speculation he did not enter upon. To be the hero of a melodrama might yield him, if the play did not last too long, a new emotion or two at all events; and as to coming to definite grief—well, as he had told Robert, no one ever finally does that in these days off the boards of the Adelphi.

“Seven-forty;” taking out his watch, quietly. “I think it would be rather a mistake to go by that, Mr. Wickham. The seven-forty is a slow train. If we go by the mail, which leaves Hatton at eight, we shall get to town an hour earlier, and I shall be able to have a cup of coffee and a cigar

—you want something too, perhaps, after your journey?—before we start.”

For about the first time in his long official experience, Mr. Wickham felt actually taken aback by his prisoner’s unconcerned and courteous manner. He required no refreshment for himself, but Mr. Durant was doubtless right; the mail would be the best train for them to go by, and he wished to make everything comfortable, and let Mr. Durant take leave of his friends—though generally best avoided—before they left.

Then Gerald turned to his uncle who was standing by, too stunned as yet to speak, and with his fine old face white to the very lips with agitation. “A ridiculous mistake, sir, is it not? but four-and-twenty hours will set it all to rights. You can come up to-morrow and we’ll see Conyers together, and for to-night I think it would be wise to keep silence about it in the house. Say I have had to go up to town on business, nothing more.”

“But—the thing is monstrous!” exclaimed Sir John, recovering his breath at last. “You—Gerald—accused of . . . why, good God!” he broke

out passionately, "the very suspicion is a disgrace! Explain it away at once—explain at once to this officer how he is mistaken—say what you were doing at the time when the woman came by her death. The thing is a joke, of course it will prove to be a joke—you take it in the right way, Gerald—but don't let it be carried any further. If this officer's duty is to take you to London, you must of course go; but show at once before him, and before me, the ludicrous impossibility of your even being mixed up in such a charge." And with very poor success the old man tried to laugh, then turned abruptly aside and hid away his face between his hands.

"If I was to give an opinion," put in Mr. Wickham, with extreme politeness, "I should say that the less Mr. Gerald Durant states about himself before me just now the better. If a gentleman, circumstanced as Mr. Durant is, was as innocent as the babe unborn, and as able to prove an alibi as I am to prove I am standing here, Sir John Durant, I should observe to a gentleman so circumstanced, 'the less you say before me, except in the ways of

general conversation, the better.' These things are forms, certainly," added Mr. Wickham, "but forms are forms—and justice is justice—and what I say to Mr. Gerald Durant is, that every word he makes use of now it will be my duty to bring up against him in the course of examination hereafter."

"And you are quite right, Mr. Wickham," said Gerald, quickly. "I see now why you warned me before not to speak. The arrest itself is palpably absurd, but you have performed your part in it with honesty. You will have no objection, I suppose, to my speaking a few words in private to my uncle?"

"None in life, Mr. Durant, none in life. I wish to put you and all the family to no more inconvenience than necessary." And having previously satisfied himself as to the height of the window from the ground, Mr. Wickham retired to the door, turned aside, and took out his notebook; and Gerald was left to whisper whatever counsel or consolation he could find to give to his uncle.

He said very few words, and all with a smile upon his face, all with a manner of calm, of thorough

assurance as to the whole thing being an absurd and insignificant kind of practical joke. "You will come up to-morrow morning, sir, bring Seton with you if he will come, and see Conyers at once, though I hardly think it likely we shall want a lawyer's help at all. For the present the best way is for you to return quietly to the party in the garden, and let nothing whatever be known in the house about my arrest. If Lucia and her mother insist upon having suspicions, let them think I am in one of my usual difficulties about money. Women are not generally very difficult to blind in such matters. I won't even see Lucia before I go, sir; I couldn't, poor child! I'll see that little friend of hers, Miss Lovell—girls are the best ambassadors in each other's affairs—and entrust her with my farewells, if you can contrive to let me speak to her here alone? Lucky I left that rascal, Bennett, in town; he can bring my things from my lodgings to-morrow, supposing, which is very unlikely, that I am to be kept in durance over another day."

"And you won't see Lucia before you go,

Gerald? Isn't this an over-delicacy of feeling; won't the child herself think it hard?"

"*I could not see her,*" said Gerald, hastily, and turning his face away from his uncle's eyes. "Can't you understand, sir, that I would not have her, of all others, look upon me in such company as this?" glancing for a second towards Mr. Wickham's immovable figure. "When everything is over, Lucia and I will laugh at it all together, but now—no, I could not see my poor little cousin now! I'll send my farewells to her, as I said, by the parson's daughter, if you can manage for me to speak to her here alone,—afterwards, when I have had a cup of coffee, I can just get quietly away with my friend here, and later in the evening you will tell them all that I am gone."

He stretched out his hand, and poor Sir John, too stupified by the suddenness of all that had happened to do more than obey, took and held it silently within his own: then, with a heavy heart (Mr. Wickham opening the door for him as he passed) the old man stole out into the garden, and after parrying the questions of Lady Durant and

Lucia as to the cause of Gerald's absence, made some excuse for asking the rector's daughter to walk with him towards the house. Five minutes later, with sinking limbs, with her breath coming awfully, guiltily fast, Archie Lovell entered the library, where Gerald, a cup of coffee in his hand, stood waiting for her in the embrasure of the farthest window; Mr. Wickham upright and motionless, but keeping stealthy watch over every movement his prisoner made, at his post still beside the door.

The poor little girl began to cross the room with faltering uncertain steps, and Gerald, seeing her hesitation, came forward kindly, took her hand in his, and led her to the window, where he had been standing. All coldness, all small animosity towards Archie had died in his heart during the moment when he first realized the new position in which they stood to each other, the danger into which through his agency she was about to be brought. Miss Lovell, the coquette, whose blue eyes, whose clasped hands, had cost his vanity so dear, was gone: and in her place stood Archie Wilson—the

child who had chattered to him in the moonlight, the bright-haired little queen of the Morteville ball, the girl whose fair fame, unless he stood staunch to her now, might, through his fault and for ever, be forfeited. For the first time in his life he felt as simply, frankly generous towards a woman as he would have felt had she been a man. Neither a prey to be run down nor a toy to be forgotten (Gerald's broad classification, generally), did Archie seem to him now; but a friend, a comrade—the *bon garçon* participator in a madcap freak, of which he, as the guiltier of the two, must bear the punishment.

“ Archie, how kind of you ! but I thought you would come. You were always kind to me—kinder far than I deserved ! ”

He spoke to her just in the tone of their happy Morteville intimacy; as though their last cold meeting, as though his engagement to Lucia had never been; and every pulse of Archie's heart vibrated at his voice. “ I don't know what great kindness there is in walking a hundred yards, Mr. Durant. Your uncle told me you were called

away on business and wanted to speak to me about Lucia, and I came."

"Well, it is not of Lucia that I want to speak, but of myself. Would you have come to me as quickly, I wonder, if you had known that?"

"Of course I would. I am more interested a hundred times in you than I am, or ever shall be, in Lucia. You ought to know that, I think. What—what is this that you are going to say to me, Mr. Durant?"

Dim though the light was, Gerald could note the ebbing colour on Archie Lovell's face; could note the quick-drawn breath, the quiver of that sensitive fine-cut mouth; and, as if by inspiration, there flashed a suspicion singularly near the truth across his mind. "You have no idea already of what I am going to say, Archie? The time has come, you know, when you and I must keep no more secrets from each other."

"I—how should I? I don't understand you!" But the words came indistinct and broken from her lips. "How is it possible that I can tell what you are going to say to me?"

"Archie," said Gerald, earnestly, "take my advice, and speak to me more openly. We shall not have ten minutes' conversation together at most, and on these ten minutes a great deal of my life and of yours may hang, I fancy. Look upon me as a friend—a brother, if you like the word better—and be frank! In short, be Archie Wilson again—Archie Wilson in the days before she had learnt to be wise!"

She stood for a minute or more, speechless, motionless, and the little hand that Gerald till now had forgotten to relinquish seemed to turn to ice within his own: at last, with a sort of sob—a sob that made Mr. Wickham in his distant corner look up one instant from his notebook, the truth came out. "I know everything, Mr. Durant," she whispered. "I was too great a coward to speak when I might have warned you, but I know everything! Captain Waters told me, and I have promised to pay him to be silent. I am an impostor, everything that is vilest, but it was for papa's sake and . . . Ah, Mr. Durant, I think the shame would kill me if I had to come forward,

as Captain Waters said, and tell before a judge and a court full of men how I went with you to London!" And then, in broken whispers—the sweet face wet with tears not six inches from Gerald's—she made fullest confession of all that Waters had told her, and of her own vileness, so she called it, in determining to keep her own counsel at whatever cost.

Gerald's lips had grown set and stern long before she finished. "The scoundrel!" he muttered between his teeth; "the double-dyed infernal scoundrel! Archie, my poor little friend, how glad I am that you have had courage to tell me all this. You shall never be troubled with Captain Waters any more. He frightened you for nothing, Archie, believe me. I am in a difficult position, the victim rather of a most ridiculous mistake, but there is no more chance of your name being brought forward in any way than of Lucia's. Keep perfectly quiet—it was this I sent for you to say; keep quiet whatever you are told or may fear, and no harm can possibly come near you, I swear it."

"And if—if my evidence is all that can prove

you to be innocent?" she faltered, looking at him with dilated, frightened eyes, as Captain Waters' words came back to her recollection.

"Your evidence!" Gerald laughed, lightly. "Why, one would think you were a Lord Chancellor at least, to hear all the fine legal words you use! It will not be a question of giving evidence at all. I have to go up to London to-night with the gentleman you see standing there, and to-morrow or next day the whole mistake will be cleared up."

"And if it is not? if nothing can clear you unless I do come forward and speak? I am not a child, Mr. Durant; I have grown old and wise during the last few weeks," she added, with unconscious sadness, "and if they accuse you of having been present when this woman died, of course I *could* help you by telling how we gave her the cloak, for I am beginning to connect all these things clearly now, and how Captain Waters saw us together at Calais on board the steamer, and——"

"Archie," interrupted Gerald, gravely, "if the

mistake is harder to prove than I think now, if I am brought into a position of absolute danger—the most improbable occurrence in the world—and want you to speak, I will send word to you to come. Seton will be with me in town most likely, and I will send him down to you—nay, don't misunderstand me," for at the mention of Ralph she had turned from him with a start, "neither Seton nor any other human being shall ever know what at present is a secret between ourselves. If I want you, Seton will bring you this simple message, 'Come.' If I do not, you will have no message from me at all. Now, I think we understand each other."

"And Captain Waters?" she asked. "I must keep my word, and send him the money."

"You must do nothing of the kind," interrupted Gerald, promptly. "You must hold no written communication whatsoever with Captain Waters. I will arrange with the gentleman—pay him the price he asks, and undertake that you, at least, shall never be troubled with him again. You have not forgotten his address, I hope?"

No, she had not forgotten it: forgotten? had one word he told her been ever really absent from her thoughts since yesterday? "Captain Waters, 50, Cranbourne Street, Leicester Square." Gerald took out a card and wrote this address down, leaning forward through the open window to catch whatever light still lingered as he did so, and Mr. Wickham, looking round quickly, remarked—in a voice which seemed, although he stood twenty feet at least away, to whisper awfully, mysteriously close to Archie's ear—that he believed the time was getting on.

"I am ready for you," said Gerald, cheerily; then in a lower tone, "Good-bye, Archie," turning so that he sheltered the girl's shrinking figure from Wickham's sight. "Let me have your hand—so!" and he carried it to his lips, for the second, the last time in his life. "If things had gone differently, I think you might have grown to like me in time, and I—well, I could have loved you better than I have ever loved or shall love any woman while I live. The injury I did you was unintentional, you believe that, Archie? and the

temptation great! Don't you recollect how blue the sea was that day, and how one accident after another seemed fated to fall upon us, and how pleasant it was to be together? You forgive me?"

She could only clasp his hand closely for answer.

"Very well, then. We shall be fast friends still, whatever happens. Recollect all I have told you about keeping quiet and not troubling yourself on my account, and—let me see, is there anything more for us to say? Well, I've got your glove, and, don't be angry, but I shall kiss it sometimes still, Archie, and think of the night I stole it from you. Do you remember our quarrel, and how bright the moon shone in as we danced that last waltz, and made friends again? You mustn't quite forget the Morteville days, you know; and however things turn out, Archie, you must try to think of me kindly! And now," with one long last look into her face, "God bless you, dear!"

This was how Mr. Durant sent his farewells to Lucia.

CHAPTER VI.

“ FAIS CE QUE DOIS ! ”

IN painful, visible constraint, not trusting herself to speak of Gerald or of the interview that she had had with him, Archie Lovell walked home that night by Ralph's side. Early next morning Major Seton, without calling at the Rectory, left home for London ; and by evening of the same day Bettina had already obtained information, from the most authentic village sources, as to the cause of Mr. Durant's departure ; the profession of the mysterious man in plain clothes who had been seen to accompany him into a first-class railway carriage at the Hatton station.

These rumours, whispered at first, and contradicted as soon as whispered, were spoken next day above the breath, and allowed to pass. On the following morning a short paragraph in the London

papers told the Staffordshire world how Mr. Durant had already appeared before the magistrate on the charge of being accessory to the death of Margaret Hall; and then every one rushed away to leave cards and inquiries for poor dear Lady Durant; and remembered how they always thought Gerald had a vile trick of contracting his eyebrows, and a most sinister expression at times about the corners of his mouth!

And up to the evening of the fourth day from that of his arrest, Archie Lovell heard no more than the vague contradictory reports of the village gossips as to how the case was going on. She called with her stepmother at the Court, ostensibly to inquire for Sir John, who had been seized with an attack of gout on the morning he was to have accompanied Seton to London, and had not left his room since. She listened while Bettina talked by the hour together of Gerald; the likelihood, considering his character, of his guilt: the disgrace to the Durants that must ensue; and the number of fine old families that she, Bettina, had seen Providence—wisely, perhaps—consign to ruin during

her life. She helped her father to arrange his cabinets and hang his pictures ; went on working at her garden ; ate her meals ; rose in the morning, and went to bed as usual. Did she suffer ? She hardly knew herself. The time went awfully, deathfully slow ; her heart beat thick and fast at every chance sound, every strange voice she heard ; a dull, heavy weight was never absent from her brain. This was as much as Archie could have told of her own condition. Poor Mr. Lovell, observing her heavy eyes and pallid cheeks, hoped, measles being about in the village, that the child was not going to take that disorder a second time : and Bettina—well, Bettina knowing all she did concerning the past, was not without a suspicion that Archie “ fretted ” about Gerald still, and in her own innermost soul felt not unreasonably grieved over the young man’s misfortunes. It was a terrible blow for the Durants, of course, but very lucky it all came out before the marriage instead of after ; and really if he *had* had anything to do with the young woman’s death, it would be impious to wish him to escape altogether from justice. The

Durants of Durant would be just as much their neighbours without him as with him ; and Archie's secret of a vast deal less consequence. Not, poor young man, that she wished the very worst to come to him : but an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth were the words of Scripture ; and Bettina had never seen any particular good come of your Colensos and other softeners-away of Holy Writ, as yet.

On the evening of August the 20th, four days after that of Gerald's arrest, Major Seton suddenly made his appearance at the Rectory. The Lovells were just at tea in their pleasant myrtle-scented little parlour, the amber sunset streaming in cheerfully through the open casement, when he was ushered in : Mr. Lovell with a manuscript book beside him on the table ; Bettina chattering in high spirits as she poured out the tea ; Archie in a pale muslin dress, her air shining, a flower in her waistbelt, a goodly pile of seed-cake and fruit upon her plate. Ralph Seton's heart swelled with a feeling that was almost disgust as he looked at her. Her tear-stained cheeks, her silence, her constraint

upon the night of Gerald's arrest, had made him feel—all too keenly then!—that a matter of no common interest had been discussed between them during their parting interview. The fact of her never reminding him again of the money she had wished to borrow, showed, he thought, some serious preoccupation of mind, some remorse, some sympathy at least with Gerald in his danger; and during his journey down Ralph had pictured to himself continually the sorrowful face, the eyes haunted by self-reproach, that would greet him when he reached the Rectory. He saw, instead, a peaceful family group; a girl, even in such a pass as this, too frivolous (and frivolity in a woman was, to Ralph, the one unpardonable sin) to forget so much as the flower at her own dainty waist! her blue eyes as untroubled, her facile smile as sweet, as on that day when—Gerald out of sight and out of mind—she waved her adieux to himself at the Morteville pier: the day when he had the excessive wisdom first to resolve upon putting her away out of his heart!

Very grim and stern, the old Moustache took a

chair on the side of the table next to Mr. Lovell, and away from Archie, and curtly declining Bettina's offer of tea, brought the conversation round, without an attempt at softening or preamble, to Gerald Durant. "You have all of you heard the truth by this time," he said, addressing himself ostensibly to Mrs. Lovell, "and nothing can be gained by treating the thing as a secret any longer. Gerald Durant comes up for his final examination to-morrow. They have brought the poor fellow twice before the magistrate already, and each time he has been remanded. To-morrow will settle it."

"And you think he will be found guilty?" cried Bettina, opening her eyes wide. "Dear, dear, now Major Seton, *do* you think he will be really condemned?"

"Condemned to as much as a magistrate can condemn, most certainly," was Ralph's answer. "Condemned to an imprisonment which, however it may hereafter end, will effectually blacken his hopes, his prospects, his whole future life. By this time to-morrow Gerald Durant will, in all

human probability, be committed to take his trial for the wilful murder of Margaret Hall. He has the best lawyers in London to help him, and as far as the preliminary examination goes, they all confess that the evidence against him is simply overwhelming. It is circumstantial, all of it," he went on, turning to Mr. Lovell, "but none the less crushing for that. Nothing but the unexpected proving of an alibi at the eleventh hour can save Gerald Durant now."

"And how does he take it?" asked Mr. Lovell, whose calm interest in other persons' concerns always savoured rather of æsthetic than of commonplace human curiosity. "The situation of an innocent man awaiting an unjust doom is one of the deepest dramatic interest, yet I suspect most writers in treating it take their stand on a somewhat too transcendental ground. Now this Mr.—Durant, to be sure, the same name as the people at the Court—is, I dare say, not at all in the inflamed heroic state of mind that the majority of dramatists and poets would, under such circumstances, paint?"

"He is," answered Ralph, purposely speaking slow and distinct so as to give his words a chance of sinking even on the "frivolous" heart of Archie Lovell, "more frankly, unaffectedly cheerful than I ever thought to see any man in such a position. Not indifferent to what to-morrow may bring—poor lad! for he thinks of those who will suffer by his disgrace—but as calmly ready to meet it as the men of his race have always been to meet danger. Until I looked at Gerald Durant's face in prison I don't think I ever rightly understood the meaning of the word 'loyalty.'"

Bettina sighed heavily as she raised her tea-cup to her lips. "Let us hope all things," she murmured, "even while we fear the worst. Let us hope that, as in the case of Jeroboam, hardened impenitence is not being added to the weight of the young man's sins."

"I think not, Mrs. Lovell," said Ralph, with cold emphasis; "Gerald Durant is, *I know*, as innocent of the monstrous charge brought against him as I am. He had not seen Margaret Hall for months; he had no interest in her death; he was

not on London Bridge at the moment when her death took place. A chain of unhappy accidents has, I believe, so woven itself around him, that he is not able to bring forward evidence in his own favour without betraying the confidence of another person; and this poor Gerald would no more do than one of his Jacobite ancestors would have saved himself by wishing life to King George upon the scaffold."

"Well, then, he is a fine fellow," exclaimed Mr. Lovell, with animation; "and I should like to shake his hand. It is not often now that one comes across a trait of the Bayard-like, chivalrous feeling of old days. What manner of man can he be, though, who will accept his safety at such a price? Archie, are you listening? This friend of Seton's is ready, like one of the knights of old, to brave his own disgrace, sooner than betray a trust reposed in him. . . . nay, but the story is too much for you, little one! Look at her face, Ralph—she is always so—any story of high resolve, or courage, is always too much for Archie's heart."

She was of an awful, greyish pallor, a pallor that

extended to her lips and throat, and her eyes were fixed with a yearning, eager expression, on her father's face. "It is not too much for me at all, papa," bringing out each syllable with a painful, visible effort. "I know I am pale—I can't help it—I turn so always when I hear of things that move me. Papa, you would like to shake Gerald Durant's hand, you say? Would you like to shake the hand of the person he is seeking to screen? I mean if—if that person voluntarily accepts his safety."

"No, Archie," said Mr. Lovell, half-smiling at her eagerness. "I would no more care to shake his hand or to hold fellowship with him than you would. Cowardice is the one thing (strange that it should be so, Seton! 'tis the most natural of our vices) that puts a man—or woman, either, for the matter of that—for ever out of the reach of my sympathy."

Then, after an aside from Bettina as to "cowardice being one thing, my poor Frederick, and common worldly prudence another," Major Seton suffered the conversation to go into a fresh chan-

nel : and in a few minutes Archie rose and stole out alone, her father stopping her to kiss her cheek and her hand as she passed, to the garden.

Cool, sweet, silent almost to mournfulness, was the August evening at that half-hour after sunset : the sky of opal paleness, save where one mighty rose-flush stained the west ; a solitary planet shining faint above the pure horizon ; the light on russet woods and yellow cornfields slowly dying, through a thousand gradations of fleeting colour, into the exquisite sombre purple of the night. With a feeling almost of loathing at the sight of all that smiling golden calm, Archie walked away to the part of the garden farthest from the house ; and there seating herself wearily upon the low stone wall that formed the boundary of the little orchard, strove to steady the beatings of her feverish heart ; to collect her thoughts ; to reason ; to resolve.

Earnestly, with her very might, she strove ; and, instead of obeying her, her heart throbbed on more hotly, her thoughts refused to concentrate themselves, her senses took note, with intense, with sickening acuteness, of every outward object by

which she was surrounded: the sweet smell of a neighbouring bed of kitchen-herbs; the ridiculous tumult the grasshoppers were making in the orchard; the redness of the apples on one particular bough that overhung the wall. When she had remained thus five minutes, or an hour, she knew not which—there are conditions of the body under which all these arbitrary divisions of time exist for us no more than time itself exists for a man who dreams—a measured step she knew came along the gravel path. She started up nervously, and turning round, found Ralph Seton standing close beside her. Oldened and worn her face seemed to him now that he saw it in the broad evening light; the fair young forehead lined and heavy; the cheeks sunken; a deep shade round the eyes, giving their blue an almost unnatural lustre. "Major Seton," she exclaimed, abruptly, "explain the meaning of the word alibi to me., I have been told once, but I forget."

"An alibi consists in proving the presence of an accused man in some other place than that where his supposed crime was committed, Archie. An

alibi, as I told your father, is all we can look to now for saving Gerald Durant to-morrow."

"Have you seen him to-day?"

"I have. I saw him not an hour before I left London this afternoon."

"And he told you that there was some person whose evidence could yet save him? He told you there was some person whose secret he was determined never to betray?"

"No, Archie, he did not. I believe, nay, I know, that this is the case; and I urged upon him—I speak to you frankly—I urged upon him that it was his duty to neglect no means of proving his own innocence——"

"Go on," she exclaimed, breathlessly. "Why do you hesitate? He answered——"

"By laughing at the very idea of the generosity I imputed to him," replied Ralph. "Said that I might be quite sure he would take better care of himself than of anybody else; that—while he trusted implicitly in his innocence making itself felt in the end—an alibi was the one thing it was not in his power to prove. At the very time when

it was necessary to account for himself he was driving about London in a hansom, the number of which he had not even looked at, and ——"

"And at what hour does his trial take place?" interrupted Archie, shortly, and in a hard, unmodulated voice. "The trial to-morrow, I mean?"

"The examination—it is not a trial yet—is to begin at ten o'clock," answered Major Seton. "It will last over a good many hours, possibly will not be finished in one day. Sir John Durant is coming up, if he is well enough, by the first express, and will be in time, poor old man! to hear all that concerns him most—the evidence, such as it is, that will be brought forward in Gerald's defence."

"And you—when do you return?"

"By the mail-train to-night. I came down for a few hours only, principally, Archie, to see you."

"Did Mr. Durant send me any message?"

"He bade me tell you that everything was right; and he hoped you would go over often and see his cousin Lucia."

"And what does a return-ticket cost from Hatton to London?"

"A return-ticket costs exactly two sovereigns, Archie. Do you want to go to London?"

"I wish you would lend me two sovereigns, Major Seton. I asked you for money before, and did not want it after all—most likely I shan't want this—still I wish that you would lend it to me."

He took out his purse and, without speaking a word, put two sovereigns into Archie's hand: burning with fever he felt her hand was as it came into contact with his own.

"You have nothing else to say to me, Archie, before I go? for my time is up; I must say good-bye to you directly. There is no other way in which I can be of use to you?"

"I—I don't know that there is," she faltered. "Tell Mr. Durant you saw me and gave me his message, and—oh Ralph!" with a sudden impulse, and moving a step nearer to his side, "how I wish that I dared ask you one question before you go!"

"Ask it, Archie," said Ralph. "I will give you a very truthful answer if I can."

"Well, if—mind, this is all that I mean to tell you—if any one, a girl of my age, was placed . . . placed, how shall I say it?—so that to save another person she must run the risk of forfeiting her own good name, the good name of all the people she cared for most, what ought she to do? If I asked Bettina she would talk about pride and self-respect and family honour! and papa I cannot—I will not ask. Now what do you say?"

"*Fais ce que dois,*" answered Major Seton, instantly. "Truth, uncompromising, unwavering, is the only rule of life that I have ever known to answer either for man or for woman. If pride and self-respect and family honour had to be maintained by sacrificing it, they would not, I should imagine, be worth holding—any of them."

"And the good opinion of the people who love one," faltered the girl, with pitiful earnestness, "Ralph—dear Ralph!—is that to be sacrificed as nothing too?"

"Most unquestionably," said Ralph, without a softening inflection in his staid Scotch voice. "Love that had to be bought by falsehood would

be a dear bargain in the end, depend upon it, Archie."

"Ah! I am glad I had the courage to ask you this; there is only one more thing I have to trouble you about now. If, Ralph, at any time it should happen that you grow to despise or hate me—don't let it make any difference between you and papa. Everything bad that I have done has been by my own free will—no one ought to suffer for it but me—and papa—poor papa would want your friendship all the more if anything happened to turn him a little from me. Will you promise me this?"

"I don't think it requires a promise, Archie," he answered. "I endeavour when I can to be just. My regard for your father would be strengthened rather than lessened by any ill-doing of yours."

"Thank you, Ralph"—her heart dying within her at his coldness—"you have been very good to me, and I . . . have been false to you from the first hour I saw you in Morteville till now! It's all past, and I don't know, if I had to go through

it again, that I should act differently—however, it's no use talking about that now. You'll remember your word, I think? you'll be good to papa whatever happens ——"

And then her voice broke into a sob: she turned; walked abruptly away from his side, and Ralph Seton saw her face no more.

Despise! hate! Never had he so passionately loved her as in this moment of her humiliation, this crowning hour of sorrow in her child's life! The truth was told: the "frivolous" heart of Archie Lovell laid bare before him at last.

CHAPTER VII.

AWAKENING CONSCIENCE.

THE evening that had closed in with such fair promise for the morrow, was already changing by the time that the moon rose, pale and watery, above the distant woods. As night wore on, the wind swept up in fitful gusts from the south-west, bearing before it thick wreaths of serried lead-white cloud, and when the morning dawned it was in rain: fine driving rain, that fell with a persistent wintry sound against the exposed windows of Hatton Rectory, and laid low whatever summer flowers still lingered in the borders of its little upland garden.

And throughout all the dreary hours, from that chill moonrise to the chiller morning, Archie Lovell never slept. Men and women meet their troubles more sharply face to face upon their pil-

lows than at any other time: a child sobs his to rest there in five minutes: and Archie till to-night had been a child, even in her fashion of suffering. This was past. The first real conflict of reason and passion which her life had known, was stirring in her now: and sleep, the blessed immunity of un-awakened conscience, was over. For a short space after her head was laid upon its pillow, the girl was her old self—the old childish mixture of frivolity and earnestness—still: speculating, through her tears, as to what Ralph had thought of her after her half-confession; wondering (if she went) what frock and ribbons she would look well in to-morrow; and if the magistrate would speak to her “out aloud” before all the lawyers and people in the court; and if her name, Archie Lovell, would really be put in print in the papers next day, and if, supposing she stayed away, some other witness would not be sure to come forward and save poor Mr. Durant at the last! Then, when her faculties were more than half-way along the accustomed quick sweet road to sleep, every detail of her position and of her duty seemed suddenly to start out

before her in a new light—a harsh, pitiless, concentrated light; such as she had never seen any position or any duty in before. It was not a question, a voice beside her pillow seemed to say, of whether her father might or might not suffer by her exposure; not a question of whether Gerald Durant had or had not deserved her gratitude, of whether she might or might not forfeit Ralph Seton's love. It was a question of abstract right or wrong; truth or falsehood; life or death as regarded her own soul, which her resolutions of to-night must solve. If she decided unrighteously: shielded her father, won Ralph's love, won the whole world, and perjured *that*, how much would she have gained? This was what she had to answer. And starting back to fullest consciousness, with a trembling sense of some other presence than hers in the little room, the poor child sat up in her bed, and there—the cold dew standing on her face and hands—strove through the dark hours of the night to wrestle with the unseen awful monitor who had arisen to question her.

It is only, perhaps, by a strong effort of imagi-

nation that we who have fought many such battles, gained the victory sometimes and more often succumbed, can picture to ourselves the first passionate conflict of so very white a soul as this. With all the suddenly awakened woman's conscience, Archie had still a child's narrow vision, a child's distorted fear of the punishment that would fall upon herself as the price of her truth-telling; and the greater part of her thoughts would be to the full as ludicrous as pathetic, if faithfully recorded. Of the truths originally laid down by Bettina, she never for an instant doubted. A girl who had passed a day and a night away from home, as she had done, must, if her story became known, be disgraced. No honest woman would associate with her; no honest man would ever make her his wife. Up to a certain hour to-morrow she would be Archie Lovell, a girl with all bright possibilities of life open before her still: after that—a blank. Never another ball, or croquet party, or happy walk with Ralph! No more pleasure in her good looks, or her dress: no more of the vague golden dreams which of late had made her like to be

alone, looking up at the clouds, or across the woods to Ludbrooke, in the twilight ! She would live on, year after year, in this dull Rectory-house ; and her father would love her always—with a saddened, pitying love ; and Bettina be justified in requiring her to be religious ; and the servants whisper together, and look at her as something apart from the rest of the household ; bitterest of all, Lady Durant and Lucia would know her, in a distant way, still, her father being the clergyman of their parish ; Sir John, perhaps, his wife and daughter not by, stop and speak a kind word occasionally, when he met her in his walks. This would be her life. And in time, she would see Gerald happy with his fair young wife ; and Ralph would marry too . . . were her friends to abstain from happiness because hers happened to be spoiled ? and she would just continue to stagnate on, alone, unloved, till she was old and graceless, and bitter, like Mrs. Maloney ! This was to be her portion and reward for doing the thing that was right : and still towards the right (not towards Mr. Gerald Durant, personally ; inasmuch as he was

young, and handsome, and fond of her : the foundation, hitherto, of whatever heroic resolves Archie had formed), she felt herself irresistibly drawn. Towards right, simply as right. Nothing to do with inherited traditions, as in Gerald's case : or with fears of heaven, on one hand, and hopes of the world on the other, as in Bettina's. Right simply as right : a stern inflexible reality, to which, whether her cowardly will shrank from its fulfilment or no, she was forced, by some sympathy, some instinct stronger than herself, to cling.

She tossed feverishly on her pillow till dawn, then got up, went across to the casement-window, drew back the curtain, and looked out. Standing there in her long white dress, her feet bare, her hands clasped across her breast, poor Archie, who a week ago could have represented nothing higher in art than Greuze or Watteau, might at this moment have been taken as a living picture of one of Raphael's Marys : a girl still in the undeveloped form and childish attitude, a woman in the unutterable sadness, the wistful prophecy of suffering upon her quivering lips, and tear-stained, dead-white cheeks.

It was barely daybreak yet. She could just discern the line of distant woods, wan and spectre-like, through the driving mists; could just see the geraniums and mignonette—the flowers that in her southern ignorance she had thought would last till Christmas—lying, sodden and defaced, beneath her window. What a miserable, altered world it looked! What an admirably fitted world for right and duty, and the life that she was going to lead in it! She stood, chilled and shivering, yet with a sort of sullen satisfaction, watching the rain as it beat against the window; and while she watched it her heart—poor, unheroic child's heart!—went back to irresolution again. How would it be possible for her to walk to the station in weather like this? They had no carriage, and there was no way of hiring one, and her father and Bettina would never let her start alone on foot. She had meant, had meant faithfully, to go. Had she not borrowed money from Ralph for her journey last night? Could she help it if accidents beyond her own control held her back? If it had been fine, and her father had given her leave, she would have

gone ; and now, if this storm lasted, and her father forbade her to leave home, she must stay. It would no longer be a question of choice, it would be a decision made by fate, not herself, as to which path she took, and by that decision she must abide.

When dawn had become broad day she crept back to her bed, and in two or three minutes, the rain still driving against the window, was asleep. At seven o'clock Bettina knocked as usual at her door, calling out to her cheerfully that it was a beautiful morning after the rain, and, waking with a start from a heavy, dreamless sleep, Archie saw—with guilty disappointment even in that first instant of consciousness—a room full of light and sunshine. The storm was over. So far the path towards this miserable, self-imposed, inexorable duty of hers lay clear.

She got up ; dressed herself in a clean white frock ; then laid out ready on her drawers her muslin scarf, sailor's hat, and blue veil, and, for the first time since the day after her return from London, went down to breakfast with her hair hanging loose upon her shoulders.

"As I like to see you once more," said Mr. Lovell, as he put his arms round her. "If you knew what was becoming, Archie, you would never torture your hair into fashionable braids and twists again. But how ill you look, my child!" anxiously scrutinising the hard lines about her mouth, the worn, dark hollows under her eyes. "Bettina, don't you think her looking really ill? Wouldn't it be as wise for her to keep to her bed for a day, just to see whether it can be measles coming on again or not?"

If Bettina had thought enough about the question to say "Yes," Archie would probably have succumbed to her decision as final: the interposition of some will stronger than her own, and against which it would be idle for her to struggle. But all Mrs. Lovell's energies happened to be directed at this particular moment to parish matters of the most vital and urgent interest. In the vestry of the church was to be held to-day the great annual meeting of the Hatton soup and flannel club, in which, the deceased rector being an old bachelor, the wife of the village doctor had for

years held absolute and tyrannical sway. A secret cabal had long existed, it appeared, for the dethronement of this potentate; and in Bettina—versed already in every detail of the village civil wars; convinced, too, that to be the head of soup and flannel was hers by anointed right—the cabal had at length found a leader. A large, an overwhelming, majority of voters were, she believed, safe on the side of herself and the new coalition. Still, at the very last, a designing, ambitious woman like the doctor's wife might be capable of anything—bribing the voters to stay away; incapacitating them *pro tem.* out of her husband's bottles; anything. And in fierce haste, her bonnet already on her head, Bettina, eager to be off to the field, was swallowing scalding tea, standing, and learning by heart an extempore speech with which she meant to address the meeting, when her husband spoke.

“Measles? Nonsense, Frederick! Not one person in a hundred has measles a second time. Let Archie be in the air all day, the heat makes her pale. ‘It being the opinion of this meeting,

and of the parish generally, that too much power has hitherto been usurped by *certain parties . . .* That will be the very thing. Cutting, but not too personal. You are sure, Frederick, you will not look in upon us in the course of the meeting? Well, then, I must express your opinions for you. You shall not be a cipher in your own parish, as long as I can prevent it. Don't wait dinner for me—I may be away all day.” And then, still learning her speech aloud as she walked, Mrs. Lovell vanished; and another obstacle in the path of Archie's going to London was removed.

It was now nearly nine o'clock; the express train by which Sir John Durant was to go left Hatton station at ten. She went up to her room, put on her sailor's hat and white scarf, took the French grey parasol from Bettina's room, and came down again to her father. She had not the smallest idea of what she would have to do or say when she found herself in that London police court, but she thought vaguely that she had better appear there dressed exactly as she had been on the day of her flight from Morteville. It might

help to prove that her story was true; the woman who lent her the cloak would be present, perhaps, to confront her; and she had no wish to hide one iota of the truth now. The magistrate, the lawyers, all the world should see her as she was on that day, the last day of her innocence—in her white frock, and sailor's hat, and with her hair hanging on her shoulders. Perhaps (the hope half crossed her) they would not judge her so very hard when they saw how pretty and how childish she had looked at that fatal time of her wrong-doing!

Mr. Lovell was in the room that was to be his study, standing before "Troy," a little disquieted in his heart as to that *chef d'œuvre* not being in the best possible light, when Archie returned to him. She thought of the night in Morteville when she had stood at his side in the little painting-room, and mourned with him for the old Bohemian life that was over for ever. Over—everything was over now! She crept up softly, and touched his hand.

"Papa, I have a favour to ask of you, please. Some of the Durants are going up to London and

back to-day—Major Seton told me so last night—and I want you to let me go too. They will be quite ready to take care of me, I know.”

Mr. Lovell turned round and looked at her with open eyes.

“To London and back? Why, Archie, this will never do! No, no, no, child; don’t take such fancies. The Durants are going up, of course, about this difficulty the young man—Gerald, is he called?—has got into, and won’t want you. I couldn’t hear of it. I shall be having you laid up in earnest. Ask me anything else.”

“I want nothing else, papa. It shall be as you choose—only, I thought I would just ask you, you know.” And she took off her hat, and seated herself down resignedly by the open window. Could she help it if her father insisted on withholding his consent? Had she not done as much as lay within her power to do by asking him?

“The weather, certainly, is not so hot after the rain as it was,” said Mr. Lovell, coming up to her side, and pretending to look out at the clouds. He had never been able to deny Archie anything

since that morning fourteen years ago when he had refused to get up at five o'clock, and carry her round the Dresden market. "The weather is not as hot, and if I was quite sure we should have no more storms—only, unfortunately, my love, I have not a farthing of change in the house. I don't know how it happened, but Bettina took off my last shilling with her to this dreadful meeting."

"I have the money, papa, I have two sovereigns of my own, but I don't want to go unless you choose."

"And are you quite sure the Durants are going and want you?—not that I wonder at that—Miss Durant must be too glad, poor thing, to have you for her companion now. Well then, Archie, I don't know really that I ought to forbid it. It is like you, my little one, to wish to be with your friends at a season of trouble like this!"

And in a quarter of an hour's time Archie was walking across the meadow path that led the shortest way from the Rectory to the station. She was not going to be saved by accidental help, she felt now. Of her own free will she had taken

the first step in the direction of right, but every obstacle that might have hindered its fulfilment had been removed by alien means, not by any endeavours of her own. Unless Sir John Durant were at the last too ill to travel, nothing could save her now from the accomplishment of her work. Unless! How tumultuously her heart throbbed at the thought! It would be impossible, utterly, for her to go alone—she, who knew nothing of London, not even the name of the court at which Gerald was to be tried. If Sir John Durant did not go, her whole self-constructed scheme of duty must, of necessity, fall to the ground. It would be a question of will no longer. She would have tried her best to carry out the moral suicide which she conceived to be right, and have failed in it perforce, not through any fault or weakness of her own.

The Durants' carriage stood at the door of Hatton station, and the first persons Archie saw as she entered the office were Sir John and Lucia standing together outside upon the platform. She bought a first-class return ticket for London—with

a consciousness that the clerk stared strangely at her as he put it in her hand—went out and joined them.

“Going up to London and back alone?” cried Miss Durant, aghast, when Archie had declared her intentions. “Why, I should be frightened to death! I should think every one I met was a madman in disguise, or something more dreadful still! And—and in that dress!” drawing her aside. “Do you know, Miss Lovell?—you won’t mind my telling you I am sure, but no one wears white dresses and sailor hats in London!”

“Don’t they, indeed!” said Archie, brusquely; “well, I’m going on business, very painful business, and I shan’t be thinking whether people look at my dress or not. Who can think of dress at such a time as this, Lucia?”—calling the heiress of Durant’s Court by her Christian name for the first time—“you don’t know how miserable I am about all this trouble that has fallen upon you.”

From her infancy upwards, Lucia had always been equal to any emergency requiring pretty pious sentiments, and a nice little lady-like way of ex-

pressing them ; and what she answered was very well chosen and well said, and utterly devoid, to Archie's heart, of anything like the ring of deep or passionate feeling. It had been terribly sudden, and her mamma at first had broken down, but was calmer now—their old governess and friend, Miss Barlow, having come to spend a few days with them—and it was very painful to think of its being in everybody's mouth, but there was much to be thankful for, especially that it should have occurred now, not later, and Miss Barlow's presence was a great solace to them ; Miss Barlow having a mind beautifully schooled by affliction.

"I'd rather be alone," said Archie, turning from her abruptly. "I should decline solace from Miss Barlow, or Miss Anybody in the world, if *my* heart was full !"

After this she stood silent—thinking over the character of the woman for whose happiness she was about to surrender her own—until the train came up. Then, in spite of renewed warnings from Miss Durant as to madmen, got into a carriage away from old Sir John, and as it chanced re-

mained alone the entire way to London. What an Eternity that journey seemed! how slow the pace—fifty miles an hour—to her feverish heart! how she hoped, with blent terror and impatience, that every large town they came near would be London at last! Now that the excitement of action had set in, all she wanted was to be at her journey's end, and before Ralph Seton—before the whole world—to tell her story in the court. The bravery which is not so much courage as a desperate desire to get through the worst quickly, had come to her at last: and the moment the train reached Euston Square she jumped out on the platform; then, without giving herself time to think or hesitate, walked straight up to Sir John Durant as he was getting down slowly and with difficulty from his carriage.

“I have a favour to ask of you, Sir John,” bringing out each word with mechanical distinctness, as if she was repeating some lesson that she had learnt by heart. “Take me with you to the court where Mr. Gerald Durant is to be tried to-day.”

Poor old Sir John looked at her in blank surprise. "To the court? my dear Miss Lovell, impossible; you don't know what you ask—a London police-court, is no place for you. At any other time, in any other way, you may command my services, but now you must really excuse me if I am obliged to refuse you." And he bowed to her, with his courteous old-fashioned air of deference, and walked on a few steps alone down the platform.

But Archie followed him pertinaciously. "Sir John, it is impossible for you to deny me in this!" she said, touching his arm with her hand. "I *must* be at Mr. Durant's trial! I—I have important evidence to give there, and if you refuse to take me with you I must go alone. Surely, for your nephew's sake, you will give me your protection as far as the court?"

At the word "evidence" Sir John Durant, stopped; and as he looked down into Archie Lovell's face, something in its intense, its painful eagerness, touched him with an irresistible conviction of her sincerity at least. That her presence

could be of any service to Gerald was of course out of the question: but it was impossible to doubt that her request was made in good faith; not for the gratification of a girlish caprice, as he had thought at first.

"You will take me with you?" she repeated, as she saw him hesitate. "You will help me, for Gerald's sake, in what I have to do when we reach the court?"

"You put it out of my power to refuse you, Miss Lovell," answered the old man, gravely. "If you insist upon exposing yourself—uselessly, I fear—to a scene of such a nature, I will certainly take you with me to the court, and when we arrive there I will arrange, if it is not too late, for you to speak with one of my nephew's lawyers, if I am satisfied, that is to say——"

You will—you must be satisfied!" interrupted Archie, impetuously. "Do you think I am asking you this without reason, or for my own pleasure? You talk of being too late. . . . Why do we waste a moment standing here if there is a chance of it?" And putting her hand within Sir John Durant's

arm, she walked beside him with a firm unshrinking step through the crowded station : a minute later knew that she was being borne along through the mocking glare and life and tumult of the London streets to her doom.

Too late! Oh, Heaven, too late! But the guilty cry found utterance in her heart alone. All was not over then—there was a chance of her own salvation even yet!

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHERE IS SHE?”

SOME of the best lawyers in England had been retained for Gerald: the great Mr. Slight to watch his case during the preliminary examination: the greater Serjeant Adams to defend him in the event of his being tried hereafter before a judge. Some of the best lawyers in England were engaged, likewise, on the side of the Crown: and amongst the whole high legal phalanx, amongst the lawyers for the prosecution and the lawyers for the defence alike, one opinion was fast becoming universal: namely, that the prisoner's committal for trial was inevitable.

Whether Gerald Durant happened to be guilty or innocent in the matter was, of course, a very secondary detail in the sight of the profession. The vital question was: would the evidence against

him be too much even for Slight—now that the Crown had recalled old Sleek from Italy to conduct the prosecution? And the unanimous answer was, Yes. Not a link seemed wanting in the chain of circumstantial evidence that Mr. Wickham's fertile genius had evoked. The motive for committing the crime with which the prisoner stood charged: his presence at the fatal hour upon the scene of guilt: the identity of the girl who was seen in his company on London Bridge: his suspicious manner immediately after her death was known to have taken place: of these, as of a dozen other minor facts, there was, it was affirmed, proof incontestable. And still, as far even as an attempt at his own justification went, Gerald Durant's lips, to friends and counsellors alike, continued obstinately sealed! He was innocent, he said, and had not the slightest fear of anything so ridiculous as the law finding him guilty. No innocent men were ever condemned now-a-days, and very few guilty ones. Circumstances connected with other people withheld him from explaining one or two things that at present, perhaps, did look rather suspicious

in the case. It was folly to think that everything would not come right in the end. And so when the final day of his examination came, and while his approaching committal was looked upon as a certainty among the lawyers, even those who cared for Gerald most, dared hope no more than that he might escape the charge of actual criminality as regarded Margaret Hall's death. That he was with her up to the last there seemed scarcely a possibility of disproving; that he was the cause of her death there could be, it was hoped, no direct evidence to show. What more likely than that, immediately after leaving her lover, or, as it was now whispered pretty loudly, her husband, the unhappy girl, maddened by his neglect or his coldness, had made away with her own life? Not a defence calculated, certainly, to restore Gerald Durant with unsullied name to the world; but when it becomes a question, like this, of life and death, what the friends of an accused man begin to think about, I imagine, is his safety—the life that is worth so little, rather than the good name, without which, to most men, life itself is intolerable

This, at all events, was the desperate view of his case to which, with one exception, Gerald's friends (men who a fortnight ago would have staked their lives upon the certainty of his innocence) were now reduced.

The exception was Ralph. Of the promise which sealed Gerald's lips with respect to Denison's marriage, he of course knew nothing: of his silence concerning that fatal night when Archie Lovell had been his companion in London, Major Seton understood the cause as well as Gerald understood it himself. And placed in the same position—yes, even with Archie to be saved, Ralph, in his inmost, modest heart, believed that he would have acted far less chivalrously than his friend.

"A man's first duty is to his God—his second to himself," he said to Gerald on the morning of the final examination; the last time he ever visited Gerald Durant in his prison. "I know, just as well as if you had told me, that you are silent to shelter some other person's reputation, and I believe, on my soul, that you are wrong! If I was in

your place, and knew that my truth-telling would cover with mere conventional shame the name—well, the name of the woman I loved best on earth," said Ralph, the blood rising over his rough old face, "and save my own from blackest, unmerited dishonour, I believe that I would tell it. I don't see that you owe a stronger duty to any man or woman living than you owe to yourself. The thing is, to do simply what is right."

"Right!" said Gerald, with a smile; that careless smile of his which was the real beauty of his face. "But, my dear fellow, what is right? *Monsieur Seton me le reponds, mais qui me reponds de Monsieur Seton?* The world, according to Figuiet, I never went deeper, was in twilight during a few thousand years—Cambrian or Silurian epoch, I forget which—with the sun just strong enough to allow the graptolites and trilobites to see a yard or two before their noses. I suppose we are morally in the same kind of twilight now. Vague lights break in upon us of something higher than mere eating, drinking, and sleeping, and in our different ways, and under

different names, we try to follow them. Definitely, we don't see much further, I fancy, than the trilobites did ; not so far, perhaps, for as their eyes had about five hundred facets that enabled them to look about them in all directions at once, they were better adapted to their situation most likely than we are to ours."

This was talk entirely out of the range of the old Moustache. Who was Figuiér ? and what were graptolites and trilobites ? The earth at the beginning was without form and void, and in six days was covered with life as we see it now. And truth was truth, and falsehood falsehood ; and neither deep thinking nor fine talking had ever smoothened down the path between them in his sight.

"You follow your own idea of honour, Durant," laying his arm affectionately on Gerald's shoulder, "and—while you talk of not distinguishing right from wrong—'tis a nobler one, I feel, than mine ; just that. You have the edge on all your finer emotions yet"—poor simple Ralph !—"and mine is blunted. When you have lived to my age

perhaps you will not think any woman worth the sacrifice of your own honour, the risk of your own life."

"I should think this one worth it always," said Gerald, simply; "for there can be no harm now in my confessing this much to you, Seton—there *is* a good name, a name worth a vast deal more than mine, that my silence shields. If it had been a love-affair, which it never was"—even at this moment what a thrill of delight shot through Major Seton's heart!—"I might feel very differently. Love, between a man and woman of the world, I have always held to be a stand-up fight, in which a fair field and no favour is all that can be reasonably required on either side. Each risks something; each must abide by the issue of the contest. But this was nothing of the kind. An honest, true-hearted little girl through me was very nearly brought to grief once. I don't say whether I was in love with her; for certain she was not in love with me, and—well, everything turned out as it should have done, and is forgotten."

"And this is the woman with whom you were

seen on that night?" said Ralph in an altered voice, as Gerald hesitated. "This is——"

"This is one of the causes for which I am and ever shall be silent," answered Gerald, gravely. "To betray such a trust would be a worse betrayal than that of friend or mistress—the betrayal of a child. If the honour of every Durant who ever lived could be saved by her disgrace, the honour of the Durants should go!" And then he turned the conversation pointedly aside, and during the short remainder of time they were together, spoke only of the business matters that he wished Ralph to fulfil for him in the event of his committal; an event which, in spite of all his outward calmness, Major Seton could see he had now thoroughly prepared himself to meet.

The time at which the examination was to take place was ten o'clock. From an early hour in the morning, however, every approach to the court was besieged by such people—many of them, although London was "empty" of the better class—as were possessed of cards giving them a right of entrance to this charming little sensation drama of real life

about to be played. Without such cards no admission save by sheer physical strength could be obtained; and even the fortunate men and women who held them found they had plenty of hard work to go through, many a severe struggle with the experienced roughs to encounter, before an entrance to the scene of their morning's amusement could be won.

At ten o'clock precisely the prisoner, or principal actor in the entertainment, was brought into the dock; and a breathless hush passed through the entire mass of spectators at the sight of him. He was a little pale and worn, as any man might well be after a week spent in a London prison in August, but looked in good spirits and smiled and nodded to his different friends, Ralph among the rest, as one after another he recognised them amidst the crowd. Mr. Slight, who "watched" the case for the prisoner, now applied for a copy of the information on which the warrant was granted, with a view, he said, to see what were the statements laid down, and also who was nominally the prosecutor in the case. This, after some discus-

sion, was granted; and then the warrant having been read over to the prisoner, and the witnesses ordered out of court, the well-known short rubicund figure of Mr. Sleek rose, on behalf of the Crown, to address the bench.

He appeared before them, he said, in his soft, well-modulated voice, for the purpose of preferring and bringing home, as he trusted he would do, the charge against the prisoner at the bar which had just been read from the warrant. The offence they were about to inquire into was one of a most heinous character. He did not think that he should be putting it too strongly if he said it was one of *the* most heinous, the most cowardly, the most repugnant to every natural and divine law, that it was in the power of man to commit. Such observations however (having made them) were, Mr. Sleek continued, out of place here. They had met for the purpose only of instituting a preliminary examination; and if he should adduce facts to justify the bench in committing the prisoner for trial, it would of course be the duty of the prosecution to elaborate those facts, and produce them

hereafter in a more complete form than he had an opportunity of doing in this court. The offence with which Mr. Durant stood charged was that of murder; the victim was a young and beautiful girl—a girl, it was scarcely possible to doubt, bound to the prisoner by all those ties which constitute a woman's dearest and most sacred claim to man's love and protection. Mr. Sleek and the court generally showed emotion; an irrepressible smile passed for an instant over Gerald's face. It appeared that at about a quarter-past ten on the night of the second instant, a dark body was heard to fall or to be thrown with violence into the Thames from London Bridge; an alarm was instantly raised, and by three o'clock next morning the body of deceased was found, some three or four hundred yards down the river, with life extinct. An inquest was held on the following day, but was unfortunately conducted with the deplorable looseness that Mr. Sleek had observed to be the general rule of coroners' inquests, and nothing of material importance was brought to light. Circumstances arising, however, immediately afterwards which aroused

the suspicions of the police, to Inspector Wickham of the detective force was entrusted the duty of making further inquiry into this darkly mysterious tragedy; and—thanks to the skill and unremitting attention of that excellent officer—the prosecution was now in a position to present to the bench the following facts: facts which Mr. Sleek believed could leave them no alternative whatever but the committal of the prisoner for trial before another court. It seemed that as long ago as the tenth of January, the deceased girl left her employer's house in Staffordshire, and although rumours as to the supposed companion of her flight were rife at the time about the county, nothing definite had since transpired on the subject. On the night of the second instant, a girl dressed in the clothes in which the body of Margaret Hall was afterwards found was seen, at a few minutes before ten, walking across London Bridge from the Surrey side upon a man's arm; at a quarter-past ten a woman's shriek was heard, a dark body seen to fall into the water; and by an early hour next morning a woman's body was found drifted in among some

shipping at a little distance down the river. That the woman who thus crossed the bridge was Margaret Hall there was, as he should hereafter show, no reasonable cause to doubt. The man upon whose arm she leaned was, it would be proved by incontestable evidence, the prisoner—Mr. Gerald Durant.

Profound sensation through the court. A smile, unconcealed this time, passed across the prisoner's face.

Medical testimony, proceeded Mr. Sleek, would be called to show the condition in which the body was found. They would be told of a wedding-ring tied by a ribbon around the unhappy girl's neck; of a handkerchief embroidered with Mr. Durant's monogram in her breast; and they would also hear evidence as to a man's hat, which was found floating in the river; and which it would be proved was the property of the prisoner. The next points that it would be his duty to bring before their consideration were the acts and conduct of Mr. Durant himself. On that second day of August he was proved to have crossed from Morte-

ville to London in the company of a young girl, answering to the description of the deceased, Margaret Hall. On the passage across, one of their fellow-travellers lent the girl a cloak, which in the hurry of landing was not returned to its owner, and in this cloak the body of Margaret Hall was found. At about ten o'clock, as he had stated, Mr. Durant, with the girl upon his arm, was seen walking upon London Bridge, and it was remarked at the time that there was something strange and excited about the appearance of them both. What was the prisoner's subsequent conduct? Between eleven and twelve, minus a hat, and with his dress disordered and torn, Mr. Durant went to the chambers of a Mr. Robert Dennison, a relation of his in the Temple; gave curt and contradictory answers when questioned by his friends as to the strangeness of his appearance; and finally let fall a remark about having just seen the ghost of an old friend's face—"a Staffordshire face"—on London Bridge, as though to account for his pallor and depression. Every portion of this evidence was, Mr. Sleek allowed, circumstantial;

but it was not necessary, neither was it his place to observe, that a concurrence of suspicious circumstances was of all human evidence the one least liable to bias or error, more particularly when the silence of the accused and of his counsellors tacitly admitted such circumstances to be authentic. It was a melancholy satisfaction of course to know that Mr. Durant was in a position to command the best services of the profession. Her Majesty's government wished to press a conviction upon no man; and it was a satisfaction to know that everything that could be said on behalf of the prisoner *would* be said, and with the greatest force and eloquence. Still, what would really tell far more in Mr. Durant's favour, what it would yield himself, Mr. Sleek, the most unmixed personal satisfaction to hear, would be—not eloquence at all, but a plain straightforward counter-statement of facts as regarded Mr. Durant's proceedings on the night of August the second! It was an axiom of English law that no man should be called upon to offer explanations of his conduct or of any circumstances of suspicion which might attach to him.

It was his duty, however, to remark that if an accused person refused such explanation, where a strong *prima facie* case had been made out against him, it must necessarily raise a presumption that his silence arose from guilty or sinister motives. Could common sense do otherwise than adopt this conclusion, especially when, as in the present case, it was manifest that facts inaccessible to the prosecution were in the power of the accused? Mr. Durant, it was proved, did on the second day of August cross from Morteville to London in the company of a lady. By the testimony of his own valet it appeared that he was left alone with this lady between eight and nine o'clock at the South-Eastern Terminus; and at ten o'clock, a quarter of an hour only before Margaret Hall's death took place, it would be shown that he was once more seen standing by her side on London Bridge.

"And now, with respect to this lady," exclaimed Mr. Sleek, with sudden fervour, "I have a question to ask which I am certain must address itself with irresistible force to every person in this court. Where is she? If this lady, as it will doubtless

be alleged, was not Margaret Hall, but some other person still living and well, is her evidence to be adduced or not on the prisoner's behalf? It may, and doubtless will, be hinted to us that there may be cases in which a man would risk the unmerited punishment of guilt sooner than bring forward a woman's name before the world; but I put it to you, whether the lips of a man charged with the most heinous and cowardly of all crimes could remain so sealed? Nay more, I ask does the woman live who would see an innocent man incur even the imputation of a crime like this sooner than allow the record of her own indiscretion, of her own frailty, to be made public?"

They might be told, he proceeded, that the lady who accompanied Mr. Durant from France did certainly wear this scarlet travelling cloak when she arrived in London, but might yet have transferred it to the deceased during the few minutes that elapsed between the time when she was last seen at Mr. Durant's side and that of Margaret Hall's death. If they accepted this startling assumption, if they for once presumed that any

given fact was due, not to criminality, but to untoward accident, they would, certainly, be less inclined towards such a merciful supposition a second time. But, alas! this unhappy victim to adverse coincidences would call upon them immediately afterwards to give another violent mental wrench favourable to his innocence. A handkerchief, embroidered with Gerald Sydney Durant's initials was found in the woman's breast. It had been well said that the die which is orderly in its sequences may be rightly supposed to be loaded. Every successive circumstance that bore against the prisoner was, it must be remembered, cumulative proof—proof multiplied by hundreds. And when to the foregoing facts was added that of Mr. Durant's hat being found floating near the body of the deceased, it seemed folly to ask them again to receive an arbitrary and separate conclusion instead of the plain cause which could alone account for this overpowering accumulation of dark facts—the prisoner's guilt. With regard, he said, to Mr. Durant's manner at his cousin's chambers, it was not his province now to speak. This conduct

might possibly be compatible with innocence if it stood alone, but it must be recollected that it was one of a series of facts which, though small, perhaps, in their individual capacity, did, when grouped together, lead to the irresistible conclusion that the prisoner had secret and guilty knowledge of the girl's death. What motive could have prompted the crime it was unneedful also for him to suggest. A dark drama, an old story of passion, satiety, and neglect, of which this was the closing scene, had doubtless been enacted. He had to do with facts alone; and these were the facts which he was able to present to the bench. They saw in the prisoner a young man overwhelmed with debts which he was utterly powerless to meet unaided. His uncle, Sir John Durant, was the only person to whom he could look for assistance; and his uncle, it was known, not three weeks ago, had threatened to disinherit him if his reported connection with Margaret Hall proved to be a fact. They next found him alone with the unhappy girl on London Bridge upon the night of her death. They had then the mute and touching evidence of

the body itself—the wedding-ring tied around her neck; the handkerchief of Gerald Durant in her breast; and lastly, they had the fact that the prisoner already realised to the full those advantages for which, it might be surmised, the death was accomplished. Whatever benefit of doubt Mr. Durant might be entitled to would, for certain, be amply accorded to him hereafter. He believed himself that the magistrate could come to no other conclusion now than that the case was fraught with suspicions of the gravest character, and that the interests of public justice imperatively demanded that the prisoner should be sent for trial before another and a higher tribunal.

And then Mr. Sleek wiped his crimson face, and sat down. His address had been, intentionally, a short one, for the thermometer stood at ninety-six in the shade; and, in common with every other lawyer present, Mr. Sleek fervently hoped to get the examination over to-day. A great surgeon, recalled by enormous fees, to cut off the limb of an illustrious patient, knows that he will be forced to wait and watch over the result of the operation.

With a lawyer, what is done is done. Whether Mr. Sleek or Mr. Slight got the best of it, their work would be finished, their fees paid, the moment the bench had pronounced its judgment upon the prisoner; and a pardonable preference for mountain oxygen to city carbonic acid in August made both of them disposed to be concise. Mr. Sleek's address had not lasted two hours; Mr. Slight's for certain would not occupy more; and it was now only twelve o'clock. By employing a little happy brevity in cross-examination they might yet be able to have a comfortable dinner together, and start off on their respective journeys—one for the Highlands, the other for the Italian lakes—to-night.

The first witness called was Mrs. Sherborne of Heathcotes, and as she came into the witness-box, making her village curtsy to the usher, whom in her agitation she took for the magistrate at least, her country carriage and open sunburnt face seemed almost to bring a breath of wholesome meadow freshness into the noisome human atmosphere of the court. Her first movement was to look towards the prisoner and cry; her second, upon a

mild opening question from the bench, to plunge into wildly irrelevant statements about Sir John's goodness to her husband, and her regret at having to appear against Mr. Gerald, and the love she had always borne to the family at the Court. But a little judicious treatment at the hands of Mr. Sleek soon reduced these symptoms of contumacy, and brought the poor woman to a due sense of the position in which she stood, as an important and accredited witness on the side of the Crown. After giving her evidence as to the identification of Margaret Hall after death, Mrs. Sherborne was desired to tell what she knew about her disappearance in January last, and she had just faltered out a few tearful words as to the note the poor girl had written home, and how it was thought about in the county at the time, when Mr. Slight jumped up and, with a stony face and peremptory voice, interrupted her. They had nothing to do in this court with what was "thought about" by anybody anywhere. They had to do with Mrs. Sherborne's personal evidence, of which he should be glad to hear rather more than she had at present given

them. And then, putting up his double eyeglass and looking at her with a certain expression of disbelief and insolence, that made the modest countrywoman almost ready to drop with shame, Mr. Slight proceeded to cross-question her a little.

"Flighty? strange? No, never!—never saw anything unusual, in any way, in poor Maggie's manner. She was a handsome girl—a skin like snow, gentlemen" (with an apologetic curtesy to the bench), "and eyes and hair like the raven's wing, and a bit set up about it, perhaps, at times; but as honest a girl, and as cool a hand for butter as ever churned. Suitors? Well, for the matter of that, she'd as many suitors as most. In her own class of life? Certainly; whose else class should they be in?" For, in spite of her terror, Mrs. Sherborne had her keen country wits about her still. She was in that witness-box to speak the truth—if truth-telling could do it, to get poor Mr. Gerald out of his trouble. But she was equally there to shield the honour of the girl that was dead and gone, and a subtle woman's instinct had interpreted to her aright the object of Mr. Slight's last question.

"And Margaret Hall accepted none of these suitors of her own class of life, it appears, Mrs. Sherborne? What did she say to the suitors of a class above her own?"

"I can't tell, sir."

"You can't tell. Were gentlemen—unmarried ones—accustomed to come about the farm at Heathcotes during the time that Margaret Hall was in your employment?"

"Yes, certainly. A many gentlemen used to come to see my husband and me."

"Name those who came oftenest."

Mrs. Sherborne hesitated, and shot a quick appealing glance across towards Gerald. "Sir George Chester used to come when he were down at the Court, sir; and Mr. Robert Dennison, and sometimes Mr. Gerald Durant himself, and——"

"Mrs. Sherborne," exclaimed Mr. Slight, suddenly exchanging his air of bantering encouragement for one of scowling ferocity, "have the goodness to weigh your answers more carefully, and remember this is not a time or place for levity." The poor woman's mouth was contorted, through

nervousness, into the ghastly semblance of a smile. "Have you, or have you not, known Mr. Robert Dennison to be frequently alone in the company of Margaret Hall?"

Gerald's lips had continued inviolably sealed as respected his personal knowledge of Robert's marriage with Maggie; but he had never hidden, or sought to hide, from his counsel any of the well known facts relative to their extreme intimacy. His promise to Robert, his faith with Archie Lovell, were all that he felt himself bound to keep. Quixotic enough to lay aside any legitimate weapon of self-defence, he was not—and Mr. Slight, without any positive knowledge of the truth, suspected enough to be sure that his client had neither been the sole nor the first claimant upon poor Maggie's affection.

"Have you, or have you not, frequently seen Mr. Dennison alone in the girl's company?" he repeated.

"Well, I have seen him, sir; but not oftener—"

"Keep to what I ask you, Mrs. Sherborne," interrupted Mr. Slight, in a cruel voice, "and leave

every other subject alone. You have seen Mr. Dennison in the girl's company. How often?"

"I don't remember, sir," answered Mrs. Sherborne piteously.

"Try to think, if you please. Six times? Ten times?"

"Oh dear, yes," she cried, brightening at having something definite to go upon. "The young gentlemen used to walk down Heathcotes way after their dinner, one one time, perhaps, and one another, and then Maggie she'd walk a bit with them in the garden or round the orchard while they smoked their cigars. I'd known both of them from boys, gentlemen," she added, turning towards the magistrate, with her good, brown face softening all over, "and never gave a thought—me or my husband either—that harm would come of it."

"No more with one than with the other, I suppose, Mrs. Sherborne?" put in Mr. Slight, blandly.

"No, sir."

"Exactly!" and Mr. Slight sat down. The evidence for the prosecution had assuredly not done much damage to his client's cause as yet.

At the appearance of the next witness who entered the box Gerald half rose, and leaned forward with an expression of greater eagerness than his face had worn before. The witness was Captain Waters, and as his eyes met the prisoner's a certain veiled look of intelligence passed for a second between them.

The man had got his hush-money, but—was he safe? was Gerald's uneasy thought, for at his direction a goodly sum had been paid anonymously to Waters, with sternest injunctions never to molest Miss Lovell, or seek in any way to bring her name forward while he lived. The scoundrel had received his bribe, but how was he to know that another man had not meanwhile bid a higher price over his head?

"You may be perfectly at your ease, my infatuated but chivalrous young friend," was Waters' reflection, as he caught sight of Gerald's eager face. "No fear of my killing the goose that lays such very golden eggs! If you are committed for your trial, as you certainly will be, I shall have an income safe without work or trouble for the

next six months—a small annuity perhaps for life!”

And then, in his accustomed bored languid tone, Captain Waters, or Edward Randall, as his name was written in the police-sheet, gave his evidence. Had stayed in the same hotel with Mr. Durant about three weeks ago, at Morteville. Remembered seeing him on board a steamer bound for England from the Calais pier. Had no conception what the name of the steamer was; never remembered the names of steamers—wouldn't Bradshaw tell? It seemed a small vessel, chiefly occupied by persons of the lower class. Believed he spoke to Mr. Durant from the pier—was sure he did, now he thought of it—congratulated him, if he recollected right, on having got away from Morteville. A lady was certainly at Mr. Durant's side—might have had his arm—seldom felt sure enough of anything to take a positive oath to it. If obliged to bet? Well, would rather say she had not got his arm—couldn't see the object of people going about arm-in-arm on board steamers. The lady was too closely veiled for him to see her face—did not, to

the best of his remembrance, wear a red cloak; believed she was in white, but positively declined swearing about articles of female dress. Certainly had seen Mr. Durant in the society of ladies at Morteville. What ladies? Lots of ladies—could it really be expected of him to know their names? Never thought Mr. Durant seemed harder up for money than other men—paid, at all events, what he lost to him at cards. How much? Well, a very trifling sum; between a hundred and a hundred and fifty pounds, he should say.

This was Captain Waters' evidence; and it was to be remarked that he was not cross-questioned or meddled with in any way by Mr. Slight while he gave it. The next name called was that of Sophia Dawson. A rumour had got abroad that the evidence of this witness was to be of the most fatal importance as regarded Gerald; and a silence, such as hushes the opera house when some great actress plays the Bridge scene in *Somnambula*, prevailed through the court during her examination. She was, she stated, the wife of Mr. Alfred Dawson, merchant, of the city of London, and on

the second of the present month returned to England from a visit that she had been paying to her sister in Paris. She happened to miss the mail in the morning and crossed by the Lord of the Isles, an excursion steamer that left Morteville at two in the afternoon. Soon after getting clear of Calais the wind rose fresh, and as she, witness, felt ill, and was going down to the cabin, she offered her cloak to a young girl whom she saw sitting in a thin summer dress upon the deck. Yes; the cloak produced (a thrill of satisfaction seemed to run through the expectant crowd at sight of it!) was hers. The colour was stained and altered, but she was positive as to its being the cloak she lent to the girl on board the steamer. Her initials were marked on a piece of tape stitched inside the collar. She would know it, even without these initials, among a hundred cloaks. It was home made, and she had cut out the hood and put it together herself. Saw no more of the girl till they came up the river, and then found her sitting on deck in the company of the same gentleman with whom she had first

noticed her off the coast of France. That gentleman was she could swear the prisoner at the bar—but the woman's kindly face here paled visibly as Gerald turned and looked at her full. Knew at the time that his name was Durant; read it on a valise that his servant carried in his hand. Told the girl she might keep the cloak on still, as the air was fresh coming up the river, and when they reached London Bridge forgot all about it in the hurry of landing, and did not see the lady or gentleman again. The cloak was of no great value, and she had never made any inquiries about its loss. Had forgotten all about it until a few days ago, when an advertisement in *The Times* was pointed out to her by a friend. This advertisement was addressed to the lady who lost a scarlet cloak on board the Lord of the Isles on such a date; and her husband thought it right to communicate at once with the police.

This was her evidence. In cross-examination, very suavely and cautiously conducted by Mr. Slight, Mrs. Dawson stated, with confidence, that she could swear to the person of the girl to whom

she lent her cloak. It was an uncommon face, and she remembered it perfectly. The girl's veil was not over her face when she first spoke to her.

The photographs of Margaret Hall, and of one or two other indifferent persons, were now handed to the witness. She examined them as she was directed to do, under a strong microscope, but would not swear as to whether the portrait of the girl who was with the prisoner was among them or not. Did not think much of photographs herself; never had. Would she swear none of them was the portrait of the girl? No she would not. Declined giving any opinion on the subject. Would swear to her own cloak: would swear to the gentleman. Was positive she could swear to the young lady if she saw her. She had bright blue eyes, long fair hair, and a brown complexion.

The prisoner at this point, leaned anxiously forward, and evidently tried to arrest Mr. Slight's attention. But Mr. Slight either did not, or would not, understand the glance. His client's case was just as weak as it was possible to be already; but whatever could be done to strengthen it, Mr. Slight

was determined to do: and this last voluntary statement of Mrs. Dawson's was, he knew, the brightest ray of light that had dawned as yet for the defence.

"Blue eyes and fair hair. You state upon your oath, that the young person to whom you lent your cloak had blue eyes?"

"I do." But here, re-examined by the bench, Mrs. Dawson confessed to having been seasick at the time she lent the girl her cloak. Her head was swimming round; and she saw nothing distinctly. When they got into the river, the girl had put down her veil, and she could not, for certain, say that she had remarked the colour of her eyes then.

"And yet two minutes ago, you positively stated that the young woman's eyes were blue?" exclaimed Mr. Slight, indignantly. "I must really request, madam, that you will recollect the importance of your words. You are not, you know, deciding as to the colour of a new dress, but answering a question upon which a man's life may depend. We have nothing to do in this court with

your sea sickness, or any condition of your bodily frame whatsoever. Do you swear that the young woman to whom you lent your cloak on board the Lord of the Isles had blue eyes? Yes, or no?"

"I swear that she had blue eyes."

"Good. Now, Mrs. Dawson, what was the manner, may I ask, of Mr. Durant to the young person during the voyage? Seasick, or not seasick, this is a point to which no young married lady"—Mrs. Dawson was forty-five at least—"can ever be blind. Was it your opinion at the time, now, that Mr. Durant and this young person were man and wife?"

But to this question, Mr. Sleek positively objected. The private opinions or deductions of any individual—as his friend, Mr. Slight, with admirable clearness, had reminded them—not being evidence; and the bench confirming this objection, Mr. Slight had to repeat his question in its first form—What was the manner of Mr. Durant to the young person with whom he travelled?

A very polite manner. That, of course. He

never doubted for a moment, that the manner of any gentleman to any lady would be a polite one. Was it a marked manner? the manner of a lover, in short?

Well, no; Mrs. Dawson could not say it was. She thought, at the time, they looked like brother and sister, or, perhaps, two young people gone off for a freak. The girl's manner seemed very good-natured and off-hand with her companion—certainly not the manner of a wife to a husband. And now, having worked round after all to the exact admission that he required, Mr. Slight allowed the witness to leave the box.

The evidence of constable X 22, of the City division of police, was next taken. He was on his beat, he said, on the night of August the second, and remembered seeing a girl and a gentleman standing together on London Bridge, a few minutes before ten o'clock. Saw the gentleman's face as distinct as if it had been broad day, for they were standing talking immediately under a lamp, when he came up, and he stopped a minute to look at them. The prisoner at the bar was the gentleman:

identified him about a week ago, when, under Mr. Wickham's directions, he watched him from an opposite window at his lodgings at Clarges Street. Thought on the night of the second they must be foreigners, from their queer appearance—the lady was, he described, in a scarlet travelling-cloak; the gentleman without a hat. Thought there seemed some kind of discussion going on between them. There had been a disturbance (this in cross-examination) on the bridge just before; but couldn't say if the prisoner had been mixed up in it or not.

One of the lightermen who first raised the alarm on the night of the second was now brought forward. The clocks had gone the quarter, he said, about four or five minutes before. Could take his Bible oath he was right as to time. It was his turn to go ashore at half-past ten; and he had been counting the different quarters as they struck. It was a clear night, and he was sitting smoking his pipe on deck, when he heard a woman's shriek, and immediately afterwards saw the splash of some heavy object, close alongside, it seemed, of where

the barge was moored. Was not present when the body was found. He and his mate gave the alarm at once; and went ashore as usual at the half-hour.

Lengthened medical evidence came next from the doctors who had before appeared at the inquest, and who still held conflicting opinions as to what had been the immediate cause of death, and whether death had or had not taken place before the body reached the water. After this—science having been apathetically listened to by the experienced trial-goers as a sort of interlude, or by-play, not bearing upon the general interest of the plot—the testimony of the river police, with its accustomed burthen of dark horrors, was recorded; and then——

Then, every man and woman in that dense crowd pressing breathlessly forward to catch a sight of him, Mr. Robert Dennison was summoned to take his place in the witness-box.

His face wore a cadaverous yellow hue—the hue of a man who has newly passed through some

sharp bodily pain or sickness ; but still the dark eyes kept their counsel inviolate as ever : still not a quiver of the lips betrayed either fear or weakness to any who were watching him. As soon as he appeared, Gerald Durant leant forward, upon his clasped arms, over the ledge of the dock, fixing his eyes steadfastly upon his cousin's face : and so for a few silent moments, they stood—the guilty man and the innocent one—confronting each other. This was perhaps the strongest situation in the whole morning's performance ; and a good many of the ladies present raised their handkerchiefs to their eyes. The sympathies of the common people were, here as throughout, upon Gerald Durant's side. The educated and refined few were naturally alive to the pathos of poor Mr. Dennison's position ; the intense suffering with which this duty of giving evidence against one so near akin to him as the prisoner must be performed.

He was examined by Mr. Sleek, and stated that he was first cousin to Gerald Durant, and had been on terms of intimacy and affection with him all his life. On the first of the present month he parted

from his cousin at Morteville. Did not know that he was in particular money difficulties at the time; was about the same in that respect as most young men of his profession and age. An estrangement had certainly existed between Gerald and his uncle, Sir John Durant. Saw his cousin next on the night of the following day, August the second. On that occasion witness had a party of friends dining with him in his chambers, and towards midnight Gerald Durant unexpectedly came in. He was dressed in a morning suit, and explained that he had only arrived in London that evening by a steamer from France. Did not recollect anything unusual in his appearance: was unable to say whether he had a hat with him or not. Admitted—and that the admission cost him dear no one looking at Robert Dennison's face, his bloodless lips, the great drops standing upon his livid forehead, could doubt—that the prisoner had made some allusion to having been on London Bridge that night: did not remember the exact words the prisoner used.

MR. SLEEK: "I must beg of you to recollect

them, Mr. Dennison. The prosecution has every wish to spare the feelings of you and of your family to the uttermost, but this is a most important part of the evidence, and cannot be slurred over."

And thus adjured—and with Gerald's eyes upon him still!—Mr. Dennison spoke. As the evening progressed, and as some of the guests were preparing to leave, Gerald Durant asked him what old friend he imagined he had seen that night on London Bridge. Witness answered that he did not know; and Gerald Durant then went on to say that he had seen a Staffordshire face they both knew, or one so like it as to be its ghost, crouching out of sight in one of the recesses of London Bridge. Witness treated the remark lightly at the time, not knowing any Staffordshire person who would be likely to be seen in such a position. Thought, and still believed, it to be meant as a joke. Parted that night on friendly terms with his cousin, and had not seen him since. Had held no communication with Mr. Durant since his arrest.

All this portion of Robert Dennison's deposition

could be scarcely more than guessed at in the court, for he spoke in an excessively low key, and with a voice that trembled either with feigned or unfeigned agitation. But as soon as Mr. Slight commenced his cross-examination, Mr. Dennison was forced, agitated or not, to be audible. No one knew better how to affect occasional deafness than Mr. Slight. No one knew better than Mr. Slight the effect upon some witnesses of being forced to speak out in a tone that the whole court could hear.

"You parted from the prisoner at Morteville on August the first. Will you inform the Court, Mr. Dennison, as to the nature of your business in Morteville at that particular time?"

"I had no business there at all. I was on my way back from Paris to London."

"Ah! And what had been your business in Paris, Mr. Dennison? Be careful."

"I decline answering the question."

"Were you in the company of the same lady with whom you visited Paris in January or February last?"

"I decline entering into my private affairs at all."

"Very well, sir," cried out Mr. Slight, with sudden deadly animosity, "then there is one question which this Court will oblige you to answer, whether it suits your convenience or not. What was the nature of your conversation with Mr. Gerald Durant on the morning you left Morteville?—the conversation you held together on the subject of Margaret Hall?"

Robert Dennison's face grew, if possible, a shade more livid. "I—I do not understand you," he stammered; but the moment's hesitation gave his brain time to work. Either Gerald had betrayed him, and fullest exposure was coming on, or Mr. Slight was fencing with such weapons only as his client's half-confidence had supplied to him. In either case his quick presence of mind counselled him to answer with honesty. Could a lie have saved him he would have told it—yes, in the face of a hundred newly-uttered oaths; but the time, he knew, was gone for denial of any kind. Truth, plain and literal, was what he was reduced to now;


and, boldly-faithful as he was boldly-false, Robert Dennison stood, the first momentary irresolution over, prepared to tell it.

As he stood thus—no abasement in his eyes, no tremble on his lips, no token of fear on all the iron face—Gerald felt that he admired Dennison as he had never admired him in his life before. Talk of pluck! why his own was nothing, for he was innocent. But here was a man guilty of actions which in every class of society are branded as infamous—betrayal of the woman who bore his name, darkest dishonour in allowing another man to abide the consequences of his act; and, in a moment, for aught that he could know, the fair reputation he set such store upon might be spotted—fame, money, position, every dearest hope of his life, attainted. And he stood and waited for the blow thus! I repeat, Gerald in his heart admired him, as one admires the brutal heroes of the ring, for his sheer blind animal strength, unleavened though it was by any of the moral qualities which raise a nobler man's courage above the courage of a bull-dog. The stamina of the Durants

was there, he thought. The poor fellow's inadequate sense of finer honour was to be credited more perhaps to the base admixture of Dennison blood than to any fault of his. *Bon sang ne peut pas mentir*. There was no virtue in *his* ever acting like a gentleman; but how can you expect a man without a grandfather to know how to conduct himself decently? When they were boys together, nice delicacy, even with respect to half-crowns, was, he remembered, the one thing he had never looked for in his roturier cousin. It was the same now. But the good blood showed in the fellow's face and attitude at this moment; and Gerald's heart, his fancy—what was it that fired so easily in that facile organisation? warmed towards him.

"You don't understand me," said Mr. Slight, "yet the question is a simple one. Can you remember the substance of the conversation that took place between you and your cousin on the morning of your leaving Morteville?"

"I can remember the general tenour of it, certainly," said Dennison, firmly. "The subject of Margaret Hall's continued disappearance was



talked of, and I advised Mr. Durant to return to England at once, and endeavour to prove his innocence in the matter. Suspicions had arisen as to his being the companion of the girl's flight, and I wished him to set himself right with his friends at once."

"And what was your cousin's answer to this excellent advice?"

"My cousin's answer was, that he had perfect confidence in his innocence eventually asserting itself. As for suspicions, he believed they had been very much stronger against myself than against him."

"To which you replied——"

"In words that I cannot consider it necessary to repeat here," said Dennison, with admirable audacity. "I decline, as I have observed, to enter at all upon my own personal affairs."

Mr. Slight's eyeglass fell; and he shifted his ground a little.

"Have you ever stated your conviction to be that Gerald Durant was Margaret Hall's lover, and that you had good reasons for saying so?"

"Not in those words, certainly."

"Did you state once to Mr. Sholto McIvor that you believed Gerald Durant had got into a mess with his uncle about Margaret Hall?"

"I may have said so. I don't recollect it."

"Have you endeavoured to set right the misunderstanding that you say existed between the prisoner and his uncle?"

"I have."

"Mr. Dennison," with an abrupt emphasis that took every one in the court aback, "are you—failing the prisoner at the bar—Sir John Durant's next male heir?"

The inflection of Mr. Slight's voice as he said this was something wonderful. Robert Dennison's heart stood still at the terse embodiment of his own guilty hopes which those few words, spoken in that tone, put before him. But rallying instantly, with thorough self-command, with a face of marble to the last, he answered coldly that he was not and never could be Sir John Durant's heir. And then—a sound, not exactly a hiss, but a sound decidedly the reverse of applause

following him from the court—Mr. Dennison was allowed to leave the witness-box, and poor little Sholto McIvor was called to take his place there.

At no time wise or eloquent, Sholto was, on this most memorable day of his life, a very monument of helpless, well-meaning, total imbecility. He contradicted himself; he made statements *à tort et à travers*; he remembered what he ought to have forgotten; forgot what he ought to have remembered; and was alternately browbeaten by the defence, reprimanded for contempt of court by the magistrate, and reminded of the stringency of the law against perjury by the prosecution. But bullied by the lawyers, and laughed at by the whole court, Gerald included, he succeeded in creating a stronger impression against the prisoner than any witness had yet done. ("Did your best to hang me," Gerald tells him to this day.) He was so wholly, so palpably guileless, it was so evident that his sympathies were on the prisoner's side, that every admission wrung from him seemed to carry the kind of weight with it that men are

prone to accord to the evidence of a child. The description of Gerald's manner and appearance when he entered his cousin's chambers; his altercation with Dennison; the "chaff" about some lady at Morteville; Gerald's voluntary admission that he had seen "the ghost of a Staffordshire face" on London Bridge; his unusual taciturnity as they drove home together to their lodgings in Clarges Street—every word that Sholto uttered told. And immense was the success of this part of the entertainment among the higher class of spectators. With a thermometer at ninety-six, and such air to breathe as a London police-court generates, the nerves require relaxation after three or four hours heavy business, even with the prospect of seeing a guardsman committed to Newgate, to carry one's interest on.

When he had said his worst on the subject of the dinner-party, Sholto was questioned as to Gerald's money difficulties, and again did him simply as much damage as was possible. Hard up? Of course, Durant had always been deucedly hard up, like everybody else. First heard of his

coolness with his uncle from Mr. Dennison. What was it about? . . . Would like to know whose business that was. Well, then—the bench having sternly interfered—it was about a woman, this wretched, ridiculous milkwoman, Margaret Hall. What did Sir John Durant threaten? Why, to disinherit him, he supposed. Thought that was what “uncles and governors and that” always threatened. During the last three weeks Durant had come right with his people again. Knew it because he had written and asked him, Sholto, to be his best man at his approaching marriage with his cousin. Did they want any better proof than that?

After Sholto, appeared Mr. Bennett; all his elegant language taken out of him, and covered with shame and contrition at having to appear against his master. He had very little to tell, and that little was terribly in favour of the prosecution. He returned with Mr. Durant, on August the second, from a tour they had been making abroad; stopped a few days in Paris, and no lady was with his master then. Saw his master two or three

times in a lady's society at Morteville ; she crossed to London in the Lord of the Isles with them. Saw that she wore a scarlet cloak during the latter part of the voyage ; took up lunch to her and Mr. Durant on the paddle-box, and got out one of his master's cambric handkerchiefs for the lady to tie round her head. Yes ; the handkerchief shown him was the same ; knew it by his master's monogram—called by Mr. Bennett monograph. The hat produced was the kind of hat Mr. Durant travelled in, but declined swearing to it. At the London Bridge station his master dismissed him with the luggage, and he left them standing there together, Mr. Durant and the lady. His master returned home between one and two o'clock ; one of the sides of his coat was much torn ; he did not bring any hat home with him. Did not know the lady's name (this was in answer to Mr. Slight). Had only lived with Mr. Durant four months, and to the best of his belief never saw Margaret Hall in his life.

Then—the formal, official evidence of Mr. Wick-

ham having occupied a very few minutes only—it was announced that there would be a brief adjournment of the court, and that the case for the prosecution was closed.

CHAPTER IX.

“HERE!”

EVERY one present detected a marked and significant change upon Mr. Slight's face when the court reassembled, and whispers of good augur for the coming defence were at once passed about among the lawyers. It was already known how, immediately after the adjournment, Sir John Durant, accompanied by a young girl, had arrived and had an interview with Mr. Slight; and how, on re-entering the court, Mr. Slight had crossed at once to the dock and held an earnest whispered conversation with his client. It was remarked, how Gerald Durant's face flushed and paled as they spoke; how at first he had appeared eagerly to oppose some proposition that was being made to him, afterwards—Mr. Slight's expression brightening every moment—how an unwilling assent had

evidently been wrung from his lips. And putting all these things together, an opinion of good omen for the prisoner was, as I have said, fast gaining ground in the court. Old Slight would not look so ridiculously pleased without solid cause. Some new and important evidence was probably coming to light, at the eleventh hour, for the defence.

The face of the lawyer for the Crown grew ominously long at the thought. As the case already stood, they had calculated upon getting it over, with half an hour or so to spare, before dinner-time. One witness more, on either side, might just make the difference of an adjournment till next day; above all, a witness of sufficient importance to make Slight look so foolishly excited. And, with a pathetic yearning for the twenty-four hours of blue Italian lake and pure Italian sky that he would be called upon to resign, Mr. Sleek, like every person present in a state bordering on asphyxia, loosened his cravat, leant back with half-closed eyes in his seat, and prepared himself for the worst.

The first welcome sound that fell on his ear was

an announcement that the address made on the prisoner's behalf would be a very brief one. It had never, of course, Mr. Slight remarked, been his intention to assert that his client was innocent of the horrible crime laid to his charge. He had not been summoned to his present position to assert Mr. Durant's innocence; innocence, according to all civilised laws, being a thing to be presumed—criminality never; and the burthen of proof, as it was unnecessary for him to say, resting always with the prosecution. In a case of purely circumstantial evidence like this, if the facts adduced were capable of solution upon any other hypothesis than the guilt of the accused, they must be discarded: nay, although the matter remained so wholly mysterious that no supposition save the prisoner's guilt could account for it, that supposition would not be basis sufficient on which to rest a judgment against him. Before committing Gerald Durant for trial for the murder of Margaret Hall, the bench must be as morally convinced, by the chain of evidence brought forward, that he was guilty, as though they had seen him commit the

act under their own eyes. That chain of evidence, he positively affirmed, had never existed; indeed, he did not hesitate to say that the counsel for the Crown were reversing every legal and customary mode of proceeding. Instead of proving a murder first and discovering the murderer afterwards, they were seeking first to prove the murderer and thence to deduce a murder! It had never, he repeated, been his intention to assert his client's innocence; but, until a quarter of an hour ago, he had certainly intended to point out, link by link, the palpable weakness of the attempt to prove his guilt: had meant to show how revolting to probability, how surrounded at every step with contradiction, was the presumption of a murder; while, on the other hand, if they yielded to the supposition of suicide, how every fact could at once be explained, naturally, and without distortion.

"The necessity for my doing this, however," cried Mr. Slight, "is now happily removed. I have no longer to allude to the paucity of proof that a murder was ever committed at all; to the difficulty, I may say impossibility, of such an act of

violence having taken place unobserved in one of the most crowded thoroughfares of London; to the discrepancy between the person of Mr. Durant's companion and the person of the deceased; to mysterious circumstances respecting which a feeling of honour may have caused the prisoner's lips to be sealed. My esteemed friend who conducts the prosecution"—here he put up his eyeglass and took a glance at Mr. Sleek's hot face—"has proved to us that a lady dressed in a scarlet travelling cloak did, on the second night of August, cross London Bridge with Mr. Gerald Durant. This fact it is impossible for me to deny. But my esteemed friend also added that, with regard to this lady, he had a question to ask; a question which he knew must address itself with irresistible force to every person in the court—"Where is she?" And to this question," went on Mr. Slight, speaking in a voice so distinct that not a syllable was lost throughout the whole silent crowd, "I have one brief and simple answer to make—Here! Here—waiting to be brought into the witness-box and to prove to the bench, with certainty unim-

peachable, the innocence of the accused! At twenty minutes past ten on the night of August the second, the death of Margaret Hall, according to the evidence of witnesses for the prosecution, took place. At twenty minutes past ten, Gerald Durant stood beside the lady whom I am now going to bring before you, on the platform of the South Eastern Railway, at London Bridge."

A smothered exclamation, half of approval, half of sheer stupefied surprise, burst from the crowd. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that an unacknowledged sense of disappointment did, for a moment, cross the minds of most of the spectators of the play: the kind of feeling people have when a fire is put out sooner than was expected, or when an impending fight ends unexpectedly in the combatants seeing their error and shaking hands. No one wanted Gerald Durant to be hung, or even committed, as far as he, poor fellow, was individually concerned. But every one who had fought his or her way into the court, every one who had gone through the heat and burthen of the day, did expect some good strong sensation as the re-

ward of their sufferings. And the proving of an alibi—even with a young and pretty woman in the witness-box—could never be one half so sensational an incident as to see a handsome guardsman, the heir of an old unsullied name, committed for trial, and borne away to Newgate like any common felon.

This was the first feeling of the coarser crowd ; but in one breast in that court a feeling, almost tragic in its intensity, of disappointment had arisen at Mr. Slight's last words. Mr. Wickham, his face unmoved as ever, was standing edgeways in one of the crowded entrances to the court, listening with the indifference engendered by long habit to the little stereotyped preamble about the certainty of the prisoner's innocence, when that one awfully distinct monosyllable, "Here," broke in upon his senses ; and in a moment, mechanical though his attention had been, he recalled the drift of Mr. Slight's whole address, and understood its meaning. The defence was going to prove an alibi. Mr. Wickham in his inmost soul staggered as if he had got a deathstroke. An alibi ! He was like a

man to whom a flaw in his noblest belief, his dearest affection, has been unexpectedly discovered; like the *chef* whose wounded spirit could not survive the disgrace of that one spoilt salmi! The London Bridge case had been the culminating triumph of Mr. Wickham's life. He had received the compliments of those high in office, had awakened the jealousy of his peers, by the way in which he had worked that case up. The remembrance of it was to have been the solace of his superannuated years, an honourable heirloom to leave to his children after him. And here, in a moment, through some paltry miscalculation, some miserable lawyer's sleight-of-hand, his crown was to be wrested from him by an alibi. Any other defeat he thought he might have borne better, but—an alibi! An alibi, cooked up at the last; an alibi which, if established—and something on Mr. Slight's face left little ground for hope that the defence was a sham—would turn the whole prosecution into a ridiculous mistake, and reduce the very name of Wickham into a reproach and a by-word in the profession.

Circumstances unnecessary to dilate upon, proceeded Mr. Slight's cheerful voice, had conspired together to hinder this most important witness for the defence from appearing until the last moment ; and it was doubtless a painful reflection for the officers of the Crown to feel that, had a longer delay occurred, a committal condemning an innocent man to imprisonment, and casting a stigma upon a loyal and unspotted name, would have been the result of the spirit in which the prosecution has been conducted. Happily, providentially, all danger of this fearful injustice was past ; and the welcome duty that now lay before the bench was the restoration of an honourable man, without suspicion, without the faintest stain of any kind upon his character, to his position and his friends.

A long low murmur, a murmur of intense, irrepressible excitement, passed for a minute or two through the court, then slowly the door of the witness-box opened, and a girl appeared there ; a girl dressed in white, with long hair falling round her neck, with a child's freshness on her lips and

in her eyes; the fairest apparition that had brightened those unlovely walls any time during the last five and twenty years at least. She moved a step or two forward, with the uncertain reeling movement of one who walks in his sleep, then shrank away against the side of the witness-box, and—a frightful pallor gathering round her lips—looked with bewildered eyes about her.

"Your name?" said Mr. Slight, unconsciously modulating his voice to the tone he would have used had he been seeking to reassure a very frightened child. "What is your name? Now take time to recover yourself."

She started and clasped her hands together, with the little foreign gesture so painfully familiar to the eyes of two men who were watching her in that court; but though her lips parted, no sound as yet reached the impatient ears of the crowd; and for the third time, with ever-increasing gentleness and encouragement, Mr. Slight repeated his question.

Just at this moment a ray of sunshine struggled in through one of the high barred windows of the

court, and falling, as it chanced, straight across the prisoner's dock, brought out, in fullest golden relief, the pale and eager face of Gerald Durant. At the sight of him a wonderful, sudden light rose in the girl's eyes. She stood a second or more motionless; a scarlet flood rushing across her cheeks and forehead; then stepped forward, and in a clear vibrating voice — a voice which for an instant touched the heart even of that police-court crowd — gave her answer:

“ Archie Lovell.”

CHAPTER X.

ARCHIE'S OVATION.


FROM the moment that she left the Euston Square Station until now, Archie Lovell had realised nothing of what was going on around her. The drive along the noisy city streets; the crowded entrance of the court; the room where she had had her interview with Mr. Slight; the passages along which they had led her next; the door through which some voice had bade her pass; the moment when she found herself in that sickening atmosphere, before that pale and surging mass of human faces:—of all this she had taken note accurately, as far as external detail went, but with no more vivid sense of its connection with herself than if it had been the shifting, unreal background of a dream. Until the moment when she saw Gerald, it seemed as though some one else were really

acting out for her the final scene of her sacrifice, and as though she were being carried blindly along in it, a mere passive, stupefied spectator. Then in one sudden, mighty wave, swept back across her brain the meaning, the purpose, the present shame, the future penalty, of all this that she was doing. She was neither dreaming nor at play—the two states that had compassed every act of her little life till now. An innocent man was standing before her, charged with a crime from which, no matter at what price, her duty was to save him; and she had got to speak the truth—this Mr. Slight had told her—nothing but the truth and to fear no one, not even the magistrate upon the bench, but answer soberly and faithfully whatever questions were put to her. She clenched her fingers firmly upon the palms of her hands; held her breath tight; felt herself blinded by a dark red mist that for a second swam before her sight; then rallied every faculty she possessed in one desperate effort, and told her name. After this Mr. Slight at once began her examination, and throughout it all she kept her head erect and spoke out

clear, cool, and undaunted, just as she had spoken when she was eleven years old, saving Tino from Bettina's wrath. The sea of faces before which she had shrunk with the mere animal terror that overcomes any one for the first time confronting a crowd, seemed to lessen and fade away, and in its place she saw two faces only; Mr. Slight's, who questioned her, and Gerald's—his whom she was here to save. What was there to make her fear or falter now?

She was seventeen on the twelfth of last October. Her father was the Honourable Frederick Lovell, Rector of Hatton, in Staffordshire. First knew Mr. Durant about four weeks ago, in Morteville-sur-Mer. "I met him a few times on the Grève, and went to a ball, and danced with him; I think I knew him very well. On the second of August, Mr. Durant left Morteville, and I went down on the pier to see him off. Papa and Bettina were away from home, and the servant too, and no one knew I went. I wanted to see a steamer, and asked Mr. Durant to take me on board with him. He took me, and the boatman was stupid and left

me there, and before we knew where we were, the steamer had started, and the captain wouldn't stop. Mr. Durant was very sorry about it, and said I should land at Calais, and get back by another boat to Morteville; but when we reached Calais, there were a number of people I knew standing on the pier, and I was ashamed to land among them—so we came on to London. It wasn't Mr. Durant's fault more than mine. I ought to have landed at Calais, but I was ashamed . . . at all events, we went on! I liked being at sea. I liked being with Mr. Durant—*ecco!* The wind was fresh going across, and a lady on deck lent me her cloak. It was a scarlet cloak; I should know it if I saw it again. Yes," after examining the cloak which was handed to her, "this is the same. It is changed in colour, I think; it looks as if it had been in the water. When we got to London I was confused in the great crowd, and forgot to return the cloak—I meant no robbery, I only forgot it. We went to a station, Mr. Durant and I, and had some tea; then he took me for a walk on London Bridge. Mr. Durant asked me to drive with him



and see the streets, but I was afraid there wouldn't be time before the train left, so we walked instead. I was to go back to Folkestone by the half-past ten train. When we were on the bridge, a crowd got round us, and in the *zuffa* I lost Mr. Durant's arm. Some men molested me because I spoke Italian, I think, and Mr. Durant knocked one of them down. The man bled and looked hurt, and then Mr. Durant's coat got torn, and his hat was lost. It was a peaked hat, such as I have seen the peasants wear in the Tyrol. The hat you show me is like it—how can I swear it is the same?—it is like it. Then came the *polizia*—police, you say—and sent the crowd away. One of the police stopped and looked at Mr. Durant and me. He said nothing, but he looked at us hard. Am I to know if he saw my face? We walked on over the bridge and crossed, so as to see the other side of London, on our way back. As we came, I saw a woman in one of the little *angoli* on the bridge. Recesses? well, then, in one of the recesses. She was thinly dressed, and was sitting with her head leaning against the wall. I thought she was ill,


and asked Mr. Durant to let me give her the cloak. I don't say that it was out of kindness, it was, chiefly, I think, because I wanted to get rid of the cloak—I should have been ashamed to land in it at Morteville. Mr. Durant said no, I shouldn't give it her, but I had my way, and went up and spoke to the woman. I saw her face, plain. Mr. Durant stood a few steps away. I can't tell whether he saw her—I should think not—he may have had a glimpse of her . . . I would rather you asked me questions about myself! She was young, and good looking—about twenty, perhaps, with pale skin, and black hair and eyebrows. I remember her quite well. I saw her hands: they did not look like a lady's hands. I asked her if she would take the cloak, and when she didn't speak, I put it round her and fastened it at the throat. She tried to answer then, but there was something thick and strange about the way she spoke, and I did not understand her. I don't know what was the matter with her—how should I? I believe I left a handkerchief of Mr. Durant's in the pocket of the cloak. The handkerchief you

show me is exactly like it: I tell by the *batiste*, and the lilac stitching round the letters. I can't swear that it is the same: a whole set of handkerchiefs might be marked the same. Just after we were walking on again, the clocks in London struck one—that was a quarter-past ten, Mr. Durant told me, and we must get on quick. The train I went by left at half-past ten, and Mr. Durant stayed by the carriage where I was till the last. I heard no clocks strike: I heard the conductor say we were five minutes behind our time. Then I went away home. I got to Morteville very early in the morning, and no one I knew, except Captain Waters, saw me land on the pier. Papa did not return home till the middle of the day. I have never told him anything about my going to London. I told my stepmother about it the same afternoon, and she said I must never talk of it to any one. I never should have told, but for this: when Mr. Durant was first taken up, I did not mean to tell. I don't know whether I thought he would get clear without me: I know I did not mean to tell. I was at Durant's Court when some

one came to take him to London, and Mr. Durant told me then to keep silent, whatever happened, and he would never betray me. I had not made up my mind to tell till last night. I don't know what decided me. I never spoke to Bettina, or to papa about coming. Mr. Gerald Durant is engaged to marry his cousin Lucia. He was never engaged to me. No; it is certainly not for Miss Durant's sake that I have told the truth: I care very little about her . . . I cannot answer you. I don't know why I have told it."

And here Mr. Slight stopped; and, by order of the magistrate, Mrs. Dawson was recalled into the witness-box.


At the sight of the girl who stood there—the resurrection, as it seemed to her, of the dead—dressed exactly as she had seen her that day, on the deck of the Lord of the Isles, Mrs. Dawson gave a start and a half-scream that, before she had uttered a word, bore incontestable evidence to the truth of all Archie Lovell had said. Did she know the young lady at her side? Ay, indeed she did: could not be surer if it was her own daughter she



had to answer to. This was Mr. Durant's companion—the girl to whom she lent the cloak on board the steamer. Would swear most positively to it on oath. It was not a face likely to be forgotten. Told the Court in her evidence—with a look of triumph at both lawyers—that the young lady had light brown hair, and blue eyes. Could not help it if she had been “that cross-questioned and mortified” at the time, as to make her hardly know herself which way she was swearing. Mr. Slight now wrote something on a slip of paper, which was handed by one of the officers of the court to the magistrate; and a minute or two later — Archie standing there still — “Mr. Edward Randall” was re-summoned to take his place in the witness-box.

If ever a man on earth was placed in a position likely to end in a committal for perjury, it was Captain Waters at this moment: and he read his danger at a glance. His threats to Archie, the anonymous bribe to silence that he had accepted, the truths which two hours before he had in this court suppressed—every detail of his situation came

clear before his mind with his first hurried look at Archie Lovell's face. Some melodramatic outburst of generosity had brought the girl forward after all; and (following the law by which innocence and virtue are ever trampled upon in this world) he was to be the sufferer. And he put up his eyeglass calmly; stroked down his blonde moustache with his delicate, paste-decked fingers, and looked round at the magistrate, lawyers, and the rest, just in the same quiet, unmoved way with which he was accustomed to read the faces of the adversary, and the adversary's gallery at *écarté*. He had not much to lose—even in such a moment as this the thought crossed Waters' mind. To some men, a conviction for perjury, might be the loss of friends, reputation, ambition, money: to him it would be—what? Not even the loss which, to his judgment, seemed immeasurably the most important in the scale, money. Imprisonment cost one nothing, and was no greater bore than liberty; nay, as he knew from experience, it sent a man back, sometimes, with nerves strengthened by early hours, and abstinence from tobacco, to the accustomed duties



of his life. If the worst came to the worst, he would still, at the end of a few months, more or less, be the exact amount of money which he had received from Gerald Durant to the good. The game had been well played ; and, whether the last deal went against him or not, he had the calm assurance of his own conscience to tell him that he had reckoned up the odds with accuracy.

And he came admirably through it all ! Came through it as it is very doubtful that a better man would have done. Perhaps the season of the year, and the unparalleled heat of this particular day, may have been the chosen instruments by which the gods of Captain Waters' faith saw fit to deliver him. With a city court-house at ninety-six, in August, few magistrates or lawyers would seek to protract their own suffering by probing the exactitude of a comparatively unimportant witness too narrowly. Skimming lightly, and with delicate adroitness, over the Calais episode, Mr. Slight extracted an admission from the witness, that he had seen Miss Lovell, the young lady who stood beside him now, land alone at Morteville, on the morning

of August the third. And after this, without a word of cross-examination, Captain Waters passed away out of the witness-box ; passed away, too, for ever out of the record of Archie Lovell's life.

[That I may not have to stain the last and fairest chapter of my story by the mention of him, I will say here that he was seen last autumn at Homburg ; a jewelled chevalier of industry no longer, but one of the scantily-paid servants of the public tables ; in which capacity—unless ill-health should chance to bring him lower still—his life will probably be passed. Paralysis, the Nemesis of such men, seized Waters within a few months of the day of Gerald's trial ; and taking from him nerve, memory, power of combination—the mental stock-in-trade of his craft—left him just bodily strength enough to fulfil the duties of a croupier. Ralph Seton was the man who saw him thus at Homburg ; and at the pitying request of a soft voice at his side, managed to slip a napoleon or two into the sickly attenuated hand, not engaged at the moment with the professional rateau : a

kindness which, coming from the source it did, made something very like tears rise into the poor wretch's eyes. "And which shows he is not altogether worthless," the soft voice said to Ralph, when they came out from the crowded Kur Saal into the blue German night. "No man, unless he had some good left in him, would be touched by a kindness!" A purely womanly inference, which Ralph would not for worlds have shattered by remarking how a scoundrel brought, by smoking and alcohol, to the state of Waters, will shed tears of maudlin gratitude over your charity at one moment, and betray or revile the hand that has assisted him at the next!]

The examination was virtually over. Already the crowd was beginning to move; already the lawyers for the crown, and for the defence, indifferently, were congratulating each other, with brightened faces, upon the termination in one day of the inquiry. In a few emphatic words, the magistrate then pronounced the discharge of the prisoner, "without a blot, or the suspicion of a

blot, upon his honour : ” and almost before Archie Lovell, confused and faint, had left the witness-box, a prolonged irrepressible outburst of applause from the court, told her that the work she had set herself to do was accomplished—Gerald Durant free.

In performing any act heroic to ourselves we are apt to gauge the effect it will produce on others by the effect that it produces on our own imagination beforehand. That her future life was to be irrevocably darkened, Archie had never doubted ; but that, in the first hour of her victory over self, men would appreciate her heroism she had felt equally sure. In what form this hero-worship would be laid at her feet she had not speculated ; she had felt only that it *must* be accorded to her. What was the triumph that she met with in reality ? Flushed, weary, bewildered, she found herself, after traversing a dark, noisome room or two, with the other discharged witnesses, among the crowd—such a crowd as only a disgorging London court can show ; a crowd of sallow-faced men and women, whose jokes defiled her ears, whose touch

was abhorrent to her; men and women bandying vile police-court jests together, and to whose lips her own name—with what a shudder she heard it there!—was already familiar. Her heart died within her; she shrank back against the black, polluted wall nearest to which she stood, and pulled her veil down over her face. This was her reward, she felt. She had sacrificed the happiness of her whole life freely, and even in this first moment after the accomplishment of the sacrifice, was forgotten. Gerald, Sir John Durant, Ralph Seton, were thinking, joyfully no doubt, of the cause that had been won; and she who had won it was standing here alone—a thousand times worse than alone: was standing among a coarse and cruel crowd, in her shame!

Just at this moment a kind voice whispered in her ear, a friendly hand took hold of hers, and drew it within the shelter of a stalwart, untrembling arm.

“Keep along with me, my dear, and you’ll be all right. There’s my cousin ’Melia’s husband waiting for me down by the steps—the little man

with the black hatband—and he'll get us into a cab, and see us to the station comfortable, if so be that you don't mind riding with us under the circumstances."

It was not Gerald, it was not Ralph, but the homely farmer's wife from Heathcotes who had been the first to come to her succour. With the timely aid of 'Melia's husband they struggled their way at last through the crowd ; and just as Gerald was leaving the court, his friends pressing round to shake his hand and congratulate him, the poor little heroine of the day, more dead than living, was being driven from its door, with the yells and laughter and brutal jokes of the mob for her ovation.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE DARK HOUR.

OF all the conflicting emotions called into play by the unexpected ending of Gerald Durant's examination—from the childish, tearful delight of poor old Sir John, down to the blank professional disappointment of Inspector Wickham, the emotions of Robert Dennison would be, perhaps, the hardest of analysis.

Paradoxical though it may sound, his first sensation was one of positive relief. Was a lurking, human remorse towards Gerald the cause of this? had his quick brain foreseen fresh combinations of possible danger to himself in the event of his cousin's committal? or was it simply the physical reaction which good and bad human creatures alike are sensible of when, after acute mental tension, the end comes, and suspense, at least, is over?

Robert Dennison himself could scarcely have answered this as he left the police-court, leaning back out of men's sight in the corner of his cab, and screening away with his hand the bright evening sunshine from his eyes. All he knew was that he felt relieved ! that he had exchanged the pestilential air of the court and witness-room for the purer one of the streets, and was returning home now to change his dress, and take his bath before dinner. And then it first occurred to him that he had not swallowed food to-day ; had scarcely eaten, had never slept an hour of wholesome sleep during the past week ; and with a childish interest, very unlike himself, Mr. Dennison fell to wondering whether he would dine well this evening, and on what dishes ? and whether, if he went to bed early—by eleven or twelve o'clock, say—there would be a chance of his getting a good night's rest at last ? A worn-out brain and empty stomach seldom admit of much grandiloquence in our thoughts or in our sufferings just at first.

He got home, took a couple of glasses of sherry, dressed, went out, and dined ; and by eight o'clock

had returned to his chambers, and was sitting by that window where he had sat and watched the river on the morning after Maggie's death; the window from whence he had heard the children's voices at the moment when he was nerving himself to look over and destroy the last mute mementos of his dead love for her. Had his love been ever utterly and indeed dead? he asked himself; for now that mere animal exhaustion was passed, memory and remorse had arisen, like giants refreshed, to torture him again. His passionate fancy for her had cooled, of course, as all fancies for beautiful toys cool in possession; and he had wronged her cruelly, and her death, however men might think, lay (and his heart knew it!) at his door. But love—had he not in truth loved her? Would he not at this moment give up years of life could he but feel the warm hand still in his, but see the faithful womanly face looking, as it used to look, in perfect, blissful, slavish contentment up to his? Something within his heart cried yes. Loss of friends and reputation here in England; alienation from his uncle and his uncle's money; the up-

hill prospect of making himself another name elsewhere, all these seemed as nothing to him now. In this hour, this first hour of what he knew was to be in some measure a new life—the common human nature of the man, the weakness on all exemption from which he was wont to pride himself, sheer craving desire for sympathy in his desolation overcame him. The dark heart, as in Herod of old, bled for what it had destroyed; cried out, with vain and passionate regret, for the love that it had murdered.

He had a cigar between his lips when he first placed himself at the window, but it burnt out, and it did not seem to occur to him to light it, or to take another. His servant, as usual, had placed some wine and brandy on the table at his master's side; but Dennison drank nothing. Stimulants, taken even in a quantity that would have set most men's brains perforce to rest, would but have stimulated his to keener thought; and he had the wisdom to abstain from them. God knows he needed no sharpening of his faculties! needed no whetstone for his remorse—no new vividness added

to the pictured face that, white and haggard, and with wan, beseeching eyes, seemed to stand before him everywhere — everywhere, in the waning twilight!

It was his first hour of pure, concentrated suffering since Maggie's death, for dread of suspicion resting on himself at first, anxiety later in the result of Gerald's trial, had until now held every other motive in abeyance; and he suffered, as he did most things, with his might, with brains! Good, diffuse, kindly natures, prone to bleed a dozen times a week, can, perhaps, hardly estimate to what extent an intensely selfish man like this softens when three or four times in a life the flinty heart is smitten, and the floodgates of the soul are loosed.

A little after nine came a ring at his chambers door. The boy, in obedience to his master's commands, told the visitor, whose face he did not by this light distinguish, that Mr. Dennison had business and could not be disturbed.

"Mr. Dennison will see me, Andrew," answered a voice, cheerfully, a voice that Robert Dennison,

even through the closed doors, had heard and recognised in a moment. Immediately afterwards a well-known step—with triumph, hope, light-heartedness, Dennison felt bitterly, in its tread—came along the passage, and Gerald Durant, unannounced, walked into his room, and up to his side.

“Congratulate me, Robert!” he said, taking hold of his cousin’s hand, and grasping it heartily, whether Dennison willed it or not. “Things have gone better than could have been hoped for with every one, after all.”

“Well, that depends upon whom you mean by ‘every one,’” said Dennison, in his coldest voice, and freeing his hand abruptly from Gerald’s warm grasp. “Does ‘every one’ mean you, or the little girl who came forward to save you? Scarcely her, I suppose?”

“I did not mean her, certainly, Robert, but even with Miss Lovell things have, in one sense, gone well. To a noble nature like hers the exposure of to-day is, I verily believe, better than living through a life of hypocrisy, as the poor little thing must

have done if she hadn't had the courage to come forward, and speak the truth."

Robert Dennison laughed: the old cynical laugh with which he was accustomed to receive any of what he called Gerald's heroics. "Noble nature, hypocrisy, courage! What fine words you always have at command, Gerald! How charmingly clear it always is to you that every woman must be right in sacrificing herself for the *beaux yeux* of Mr. Gerald Durant! I need scarcely ask," he added, "how Miss Lovell's heroism, nobility, and courage, will be rewarded? With her name compromised as it is, I need scarcely ask if you mean to give up Lucia—fifty thousand pounds and all—and make Miss Lovell your wife?"

At the tone of Robert Dennison's voice, at the cold reception that it was evident he intentionally gave him, Gerald moved a step or two away from his side; and leaning his arm up against the wall beside the window, turned his face slightly from his cousin. As he stood thus, the graceful profile of his head and face showed, in clear silhouette, against the pure grey of the evening sky; and

Dennison felt how he hated, how he abhorred, its beauty! He had never loved Gerald from the moment of his birth. As a child, a boy, a man, he had been jealous of every good thing which had been accorded to this easy, careless, unambitious nature, and denied to himself; but he had never positively loathed him until this moment. For now Gerald had committed the one offence which, to a heart like Dennison's, is beyond forgiveness: had treated him with generosity!

"You don't answer, Gerald. I suppose my question about Miss Lovell was an indiscreet one for me to ask, eh?"

"It certainly is not the subject which I came here to speak about," answered Gerald; "but if you really care to have an answer, I'll give it you in two words. Miss Lovell"—with a sort of effort he brought this out—"will never be my wife!"

"Ah, so I thought. The honour of having saved you must be her reward! We will speak no more of her. And what is the subject then, as love matters are too sacred for us to handle, to which I am indebted for the pleasure of seeing you?"

Dennison's tone and manner were unmistakably those of a man determined to quarrel; but Gerald kept his temper admirably. Incapable though he was of thoroughly fathoming the depths of that sombre nature, he knew enough of it to sympathise with the miserable position of humiliated pride in which Dennison at this hour must feel himself to stand; and pitied him from his heart.

"There is much to be said between us, Robert, and—and I thought it might be as well got over to-night. If you don't care to be disturbed, though, I can go away, and come another time."

"No, no," interrupted Dennison, brusquely. "No other time for me, thank you. I know pretty well what you've come here about, and I'd rather have it out at once. 'After the late painful circumstances, the honour of the Durants, of Mr. Gerald Durant especially, requires a more complete vindication. Sooner than sully the honour of his family, and the sacredness of his own word, he did not betray the secret of a certain ill-born cousin of his, when by betraying it he could have insured his own safety. What he now demands is that this

plebeian connection shall betray himself, and, having named his price for doing so, engage to go quietly out of the country, and disturb the peace and honour of his family no more.' 'Curse it—speak out, can't you!' he exclaimed, with sullen passion, as Gerald continued silent. "You know your lesson, and I'm sure I've made it easy enough for you to say."

Then Gerald turned round, and faced Dennison full. "I don't think that I deserve this tone from you, Robert; upon my soul, I don't! I've kept pretty staunch to you throughout, as you know, and what I want now is, that everything that *must* be said between us should be said in a friendly spirit: said as it ought to be," he added, kindly, "between two men brought up, as we were, to look upon each other as brothers."

"Afterwards! You can suppose all this sort of preamble said, please. Afterwards! What is it that you want from me? What has brought you here now?"

And thus forced to use plain language; seeing, too, the temper of the man he had to deal with—

but still with hesitation, still in the softest, most generous, words that he could choose — Gerald spoke. Up to this moment he had not mentioned to any living man one word of his cousin's marriage; but the time had come when, for other interests as well as his own, it was simply just that the truth should be made known: not publicly, of necessity, but among themselves—to Sir John and Lady Durant, and to Lucia. He thought he had a right to demand this; and in return undertook to promise that no estrangement between Dennison and any member of the family should be the result. "You've suffered bitterly enough already, Robert," he finished, his voice trembling with earnestness; "and among all of us who care for you, the past shall be as much dead as though it had never been. The only brains we have among us are in your head, and if you want anything that Sir John's interest could do, I know right well——"

"If anything that Sir John's interest could do," interrupted Dennison, slowly and distinctly; "if— if anything that the interest of every Durant who ever lived could do, was put before me at this

instant, I should refuse it. Family interest, family name, honour, money, are for you. I wish you joy of them. Do you think I can't foresee all your delightful future life?" he added, with cutting irony. "Married to Lucia, and bored to death by her; taking a row of Lucia's children to church, to set a good example in your parish; cringing to constituents; yawning through debates in the House, about which you know nothing, and for which you care less; increasing domination of your wife, port wine, gout, and a place in the family vault! This, my poor Gerald, will be your life, and it will suit you. Only don't think I wish to encroach upon any of the prerogatives that are yours by birthright."

But still no sarcasm rose to Gerald's lips; no taunt as to how Robert Dennison *had* once desired these things, and had failed in the attainment of them. Men speak strongly about the things for which they care in earnest. Money, respectability, a seat in Parliament, would (could he have possessed them) have been Dennison's gods; and their forfeiture fired him into passion. The prospect of

inheriting them all touched Gerald Durant with no thrill of pleasure whatsoever. A dinner in good company at the *Maison Dorée*; a hard run, well mounted; a voice like Patti's; a pair of blue eyes like Archie Lovell's: these were the only things in life that his pleasure-loving nature ever coveted, and in his heart there was not one feeling of exultation over his approaching good fortune or of anger against Robert for his depreciation of it. Nay, in his heart, were the very truth told, he half envied his roturier cousin at this moment—for he was free, still!

“And what are your prospects then, Robert? After the delightful sketch you have given of my life—for which I am so well suited—it is fair, I think, that you should give me a fellow-picture of your own. You are not going to marry your first cousin, certainly, but in what other respects will your life be so very much freer from the common bore and weariness of living than mine?”

“Simply in this—and to you, perhaps, the words contain less meaning than they do to me: I shall be my own master! The bread that my own right

hand earns for me I shall eat, unembittered by the thought that I have sold my life and manhood to buy it. You understand?"

"I hear you."

"As to my prospects, they can be told in a few words—joyful words for you to bear to Durant's Court to-morrow, or whenever you go there next! In a fortnight I shall have left England, and all of you, for ever."

"Left England? Robert, this is madness—the mere over-wrought feeling of the moment."

"It is nothing of the kind," interrupted Denison, curtly. "Months ago I knew that there was an opening for me in Melbourne, and it suits my convenience now to accept it. 'Tis no place of honour, Gerald," he added, with a bitterness of tone impossible to dissemble. "No post that any of the family will care to boast a relation, unhappily near to them in blood, fills! One of the contributors to the principal Melbourne paper was killed in a street-quarrel a few months ago, and the editor sent an offer to the writer of certain articles in one of the London reviews to replace

him. That writer was myself. Now you know my prospects, and also how very unprofitable even the highest county interest would be to me for the future! No, thank you," for Gerald was about, eagerly, to speak; "I don't even want money. A couple of flannel shirts, a coat, revolver, and bowie-knife, are about as much as a Melbourne penny-a-liner need possess! If I'm not stabbed, like my predecessor, I haven't much doubt about earning money enough to live upon, and if I am—at least I shan't lie under the weight of family marble, and have the charity children hired to walk, two and two, and whine over me at my funeral! But that difference is one of degree rather than of kind, and it will be but a matter of a few years whether you, in the tomb of all the Durants, or I in a nameless grave, in a Melbourne burial-ground, are fertilising the ground again! Now, have you anything more to say? I ought, I dare say, to make speeches about the occurrences of the last few days, but really I see no object to be fulfilled by doing so. You have acted—like a Durant, let us say, and I like a Dennison! No

words to you can be stronger. But, gentleman or blackguard, our paths for the future at all events lie apart." And he rose, and with cold and not undignified stateliness moved a step or two in the direction of the door.

Faithful, generous, true as he had been throughout, Gerald Durant did yet at this moment feel wonderfully small in his own estimation. When you have come to befriend, to forgive a man who has wronged you, under his own roof, and he tells you boldly that he is a blackguard—if you like to think him so—but desires nothing either from your forgiveness or your friendship, it is not an easy thing to retreat from the scene with a very thorough sense of your own dignity!

"I shall remember you always as the nearest relation I have, Robert. All our present feelings will soften some day, and then——"

"Then, perhaps, Robert Dennison will come to his senses and be glad, at whatever price is bid, to offer the reparation he owes to the wounded family honour. Robert Dennison will do nothing of the sort. He gives you freely, now, the information

you have come here to seek. On the tenth of January last, Robert Dennison was married to Margaret Hall at the church of St. Ethelburga, in the city, and you—are freed from your promise! You may get a certificate of the marriage—it is my wish that you should do so—and take it with you to Durant's Court to-morrow. Has more to be said?" for Gerald lingered uneasily yet. "You have got Lucia, and I—have lost——"

His voice died: he turned, walked across to the window, and there, through blinding mists, stood looking out at the river, black and desolate to him now as it had been to Maggie on that night when she fled from the girl's song, and from her own last hopes of love and of life down the narrow city street!

And so—alone in the dark hour of retribution—Gerald left him.

CHAPTER XII.

“ADVIENTE QUE POURRA !”

THAT evening, close to suffocation in the hot heart of London, was fresh, as early autumn evenings are after rain, in the green stillness of the far-away Staffordshire fields.

When Archie Lovell had bade good-bye to her companion at the Hatton Station, and was walking slowly homeward through the sinking light, it seemed to her that trees had never looked so green, nor meadows smelt so sweet, as on this evening ; and greenness and freshness both smote upon her heart with an unutterable sense of pain ! What, the world had not changed a bit, then, only her life ? The trees were ready with their friendly shelter, the fields with their thousand odours for all the lives that could enjoy them still ! for young girls with their companions ; for lovers whispering in

the twilight; for all bright and joyous lives—lives undarkened by shame, loveless and alone as hers would be!

As she walked along she pictured drearily to herself how the remainder of this dreary week would pass. To-day was Wednesday; three days to drag through before she must put on her new bonnet, and best dress, and go to the village church for all the people to gaze at her! To look forward to the end of life itself could scarcely have seemed longer than to look forward these three days. After Sunday she thought it would be different. When all the parish people, when the Durants and Major Seton had seen her, and said and thought their worst, she might brave her altered condition better. The newness of the shame would wear even from her father's heart in time; and people after nine days would tire of talking of her—this consolation Mrs. Sherborne had offered during the journey—and she would set herself regular tasks of work; and so get through the hours, perhaps.

After Sunday. But how bear the intolerable

weight of the three intervening days? how bear the silent misery of her father's face? how endure Bettina's loud reproaches, and the silent wonder of the servants? Next week, it seemed to her, she would be old in suffering—callous, hardened. If she could but shirk the present—crouch down her head in some dark corner where no eye should see her, and wake and find the thing told—half of the nine days' wonder over! and then, with a blank dead sensation, almost like a physical pain, the knowledge fell full upon her of how she had no choice whatever in the matter, but must bear *all*—the first hot shame, the fevered excitement of notoriety, the dull passing away into oblivion and contempt: all. The whole harvest which her folly had sown: her self-sacrifice and her generosity garnered in for her. Was truth such a much finer and nobler thing than falsehood? she asked herself. And the only answer her heart gave was, that while she was telling falsehood she had been tolerably happy; and now that she had told the truth she was intolerably miserable. In her heroic moments, as she was travelling up to

London this morning, she had thought, "I shall be Archie Wilson, the Bohemian, again, after to-day. When everything is known, my conscience will have got back its freedom, whatever else I lose." And everything was known, and she was not Archie Wilson, the Bohemian, at all. She was a Philistine, heart and soul: a Philistine yearning bitterly after the good, solid things of life—the peace, the honour, the repute, which her own rash generosity had robbed her of.

All was peaceful and at rest when she reached home: the purple twilight closing round the little parsonage, the birds twittering to each other yet among the garden-trees, the rain-washed china-roses smelling sweet around the porch: all peaceful and at rest in the quiet country home upon which the knowledge of her story was about to bring shame and desolation. With a beating heart she walked to the parlour-door, opened it, and found Bettina seated alone there at her tea, her bonnet still on—the strings turned back over her shoulders—her face heated, and with one candle, as if in ostentatious economy, to light her at her repast.

"Where's papa?" said Archie, bluntly; and walking up to the table, she looked steadily into her stepmother's face.

Mrs. Lovell turned down the corners of her mouth, and pushed a couple of plates from her with a gesture of repugnance. They contained the remains of an excellent high tea; cold chicken bones, a look as of salad upon one; a large piece of home-baked cake, butter, and a suspicion of marmalade on the other. But nothing exasperated Bettina so much as the imputation of being able to swallow food when she was alone or in adversity.

"Don't ask me where your father is, Archie! At Major Seton's, no doubt, talking of his bronzes, and his clocks, and his Madame Pompadours—a very nice subject for a minister of the gospel!—and leaving me to work the precious cure of souls . . . beard that vile woman, and then be insulted by my own turn-coat party in a public vestry, and when they tantamount to promised me sixteen votes last night! But I've done my best," added Bettina, with rising choler. "I've tried to start

things as they should be started in the parish, and now your father may do the rest. Only don't ask me where he is. I wash my hands of everything to do with the parish . . . and when he ought to have been at my side, supporting me. Nine hours with only a cracknel, and now the sight of food makes me sick !" And she pushed the plates, virtuously, a couple of inches further on the table.

Parochial victory had, after all, not fallen into the hands Mrs. Lovell intended. Mrs. Brown, the surgeon's wife, had certainly been ousted, mainly through Bettina's exertions, from the place of power ; but at the eleventh hour a base coalition had arisen, by which old Miss Smith, the miller's sister, had been put into her place. On that memorable thirteenth of June, when Pitt declared to the thunderstruck House that he should vote in favour of Mr. Fox, a greater blank could scarcely have overcome the hearts of Warren Hastings' followers than had overcome Mrs. Lovell when before eighteen ladies in the vestry the leader of her own party had announced her intention of supporting the miller's sister, *vice* Mrs. Brown

deposed. The barrenness of human ambitions—the frailty of human alliances—was laid bare before her heart in that hour; and the continued absence of her husband and stepdaughter, on her return home, had worked her wounded spirit up to the last point of irritation. Archie saw that it was so with relief. Kind words, gentleness, were, she knew, what would be too much for her bursting heart now; and, seating herself at the table, she cut off a slice of bread, and asked Bettina, in a voice that she tried to make like her usual one, for tea. “You—you don’t ask after my news,” she stammered, after some moments had passed in silence. “Have you heard ——”

“I have heard nothing,” interrupted Mrs. Lovell, hotly, “and I don’t wish to hear. No news is ever of any good to us.”

“Mr. Durant is free, Bettina, that is all. I thought perhaps you might be glad to know it.”

“I am not glad. I want to hear nothing about the Durants;” and Bettina, burning in her very soul with curiosity, got up with dignity from the table. “I have no further interest in anything

connected with this parish. As Mr. Durant is in possession of the clue to our dishonour you need scarcely tell me that he will return to the neighbourhood! To-day I should say would be about the last time you will ever be invited to the Court—for, although you have not the civility to tell me, I conclude that is where you have spent the day. Nothing but this scrape of his own has, I am convinced, kept the young man silent so long. Good-night to you, Archie, and when your father *does* return let him know that, worn out with fatigue and trouble, I have retired to my rest."

"But, Bettina, I want to tell you——"

"I will hear nothing to-night, Archie. Peace and quiet, not frivolous worldly talk, are what I stand in need of now!"

And blind to the white wan face, the hollow eyes that were pleading to her to stay, Mrs. Lovell went off at once to her room, shutting the door immediately afterwards with the peculiar sharp energy which always warned the other members of the household when any lengthened course of meditation was in prospect.

So to her father alone the first hard confession would have to be made! if indeed some blackened, distorted version of the story Mrs. Sherborne had brought down from London had not already reached his ears. She lingered over the tea-table; absently, and without hunger, eating a mouthful or two of bread until the servant came in to clear the things; then, nervously dreading lest the girl should watch her too closely, went out of doors and with heavy limbs dragged herself to the same spot at the boundary of the orchard where she had parted from Ralph last night.

She would rest herself here, she thought, till she heard her father's step at the garden-gate; then go boldly to him, and while he kissed her, while he held her in his arms, sob out to him the story of her shame! It would be easier so perhaps, after all! easier with no one to come between her prayers and his forgiveness! easier with the darkness screening away the horrible suffering that she shrank from having to look at on his face!

It was nearly ten o'clock before Mr. Lovell returned home. Archie started up eagerly at the

sound of his well-known step upon the gravel; then sank back, with sickening terror, into her seat. Her father was not alone; and the voice that was talking to him in those low but earnest tones was Major Seton's. Then all was told and over! How the time that followed passed she never knew; or whether minutes or hours went by in the kind of deathly swoon into which her heart fell. What she distinctly knew, what she distinctly remembers next, was Major Seton being at her side, speaking very gently to her, and with tender care wrapping something warm around her chilled frame.

"Margaret told us you were out here still, and your father made me bring this—his own thick plaid—and faithfully promise to wrap you in it. I have not suffocated you quite, have I, Archie?"

"Does—does papa know?" was all she could falter: and her head sank forward on her breast.

"Yes, Archie, he knows everything," said Major Seton. "You must not be angry with me for

telling him first, but I met him returning from the village, as I walked up from the station, and the temptation to be the bearer of the good news was too strong for me. Why did you run away from us all?" he added, taking her cold, pulseless hand into his. "We all wanted to be your escort from the police-court, old Sir John, Gerald, and I—and found you flown. If you had waited to come by the express, as I did, you see you would have got home very nearly as soon, and have had me as your companion on your journey."

"I—I never thought that you would remember me! I thought every one would be thinking of Mr. Durant alone! Major Seton," raising her face—deathly pale, even in that dim light, he saw it was; and in its pallor loved it more than he had ever loved it in its bloom—"are you sure that you have told him all?"

"I have told him *all*, Archie. Your father knows every word of the story now; knows how true to herself his daughter has been at last—how brave, how faithful——"

"Oh," she cried, starting up passionately, "let

me go to him! I, brave—I, faithful—and papa knows everything, and can think me so still!"

But Major Seton kept her hand fast in his. "You shall go to your father in a few minutes, but I am going to talk to you a little first. He wishes it to be so."

She seated herself obediently; and Ralph, instead of speaking, busied himself again in drawing the plaid around her shoulders. As he did this, Archie was conscious that his hand trembled strangely; and the blood began to flow with life again in her veins. Was it dimly possible, not only that her father forgave her, but that Ralph would take her back to the old place—no, not to that; to a place higher and dearer far in his heart?

She stammered out something about his great goodness, and the trouble he took for her, and how unworthy she was of it all; and then Ralph flung his arm around the little shrinking figure, plaid and all, and drew her to his side.

"Archie, can you ever care for me?" he whispered. "I'm too old and too rough and too plain

for you, I know, but I love you from my heart! Will you have me?"

"I—I? ah, Major Seton, you are saying this now out of kindness!"

"Am I? Kindness to myself, then. Why, Archie," his voice sinking into a tone of wonderful tenderness, "what hope but you have I had in my life? What have I ever wanted to possess but you? Don't pretend to think it a new thing. You know that as a child I loved you, as a girl——"

"As a girl found me changed and false and worthless!" she interrupted, with something of her old impetuosity. "The first day in Morteville, don't you remember how I looked in your face—oh, Major Seton, you won't hate me when you think of it?—and told you I had never been in London in my life! I was afraid at first you had recognised me, and were going to tell papa, and then, when you didn't speak, I thought perhaps if I told one great story it might set everything right—and I told it!"

"You did," said Major Seton; "and considering

that I had looked deliberately in your face in London, and then helped you into the train at Ashford, you would have acted less like a child perhaps by speaking the truth."

"And you knew everything from the first then?" she cried. "You have known all along that I was acting a false part to you?"

Major Seton did not answer; only held her closer to his side, and looked down fondly into the face upheld so close to his.

"You have known all along that I was deceiving you?" she persisted; "and yet you tell me that you care for me still? It's pity, pity that makes you say this, Major Seton! You are so sorry for what I suffered to-day, and for papa, and the shame I have brought upon him and——"

"And I ask you to be my wife, Archie? Do you refuse me?"

"If I thought it wasn't from pity that you ask me!" she stammered, trying in vain to turn away from him.

And then Major Seton held her close against his heart: the heart from which he had never—no,

not for one instant—succeeded in putting her away, and their compact was made. . . .

. . . “I shall never be quite sure you did not ask me out of pity!” said Archie, after a long silence.

“And I shall never be quite sure that you did not once like Gerald Durant better than you will ever like me!” said Major Seton, quickly. “So we shall each have some kind of misgiving to disturb our peace. Which has the most probability, do you think, for its basis? Look in your glass any morning, Miss Lovell, and say if it’s likely that I, Ralph Seton, asked you to be my wife out of pity? Look at me and Gerald, any time when we are together, and say which would be the likeliest man to win a young girl’s fancy?”

“I didn’t know we were talking of fancies now, Major Seton; I thought we were talking of——”

“Of what, Archie?”

“Of love, then! as you make me say it; and Gerald did take my fancy once; he takes it still: and you—oh, how badly I express everything!”

But Ralph Seton did not seem to think so.

They lingered on and on, forgetting, with the sublime selfishness of lovers, that poor Mr. Lovell, all this time, was patiently waiting for them at the hall-door; and were only recalled at last to a consciousness of the external world by the distant village clock striking eleven. As they rose to go, Archie stood for a minute or two, silent and thoughtful; then suddenly she turned, threw up her arms around Major Seton's neck, and, drawing down his head to her level, pressed his brown scarred cheek with her lips: the lips whose bloom was still intact as when she had kissed and clung to him last, a little child in Genoa.

"You forgive me utterly, Ralph? I'm not noble, or heroic, or any of the fine things you have called me. It was accident, I think, that made me tell the truth at all, and up to the last I would have got out of telling it if I could; but *you* forgive me freely, as you forgave my falsehood about Tino long ago? You know that you have not one scruple in asking me to be your wife?"

And I find, after several unsuccessful attempts, that I must give up trying to describe what Ralph

Seton felt and answered. Can one language ever adequately reproduce another? Can dull ink and paper transcribe what a girl's fresh voice, what the touch of a girl's lips say, to the world-wearied heart of a man like Seton, in such a moment as this?

"Forgive you, my dearest!" he cried at last, bending over her with a great reverence in his tenderness. "No, Archie. When it is a question of forgiveness, of unworthiness, between us two, I feel that it is my place to be silent. Kiss me once more; put your hands in mine—so. Now, child, you and I will keep perfect faith, whatever comes, for the future. '*Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra,*' you remember?"

"I remember," she answered, between her tears. "'*Advienne que pourra*.'—oh, Ralph! can anything ever happen to part us two again?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE BLUE.

WHEN Sunday came, the country people, from miles around, flocked in to Hatton church, as Archie had expected, to look at her ; only, instead of being an object of contempt, she found herself a heroine ! instead of humiliation, she had her triumph at last ! On the preceding Friday, Lady Durant and Lucia (acting, no doubt, from the generous dictates of their own hearts, but a little, too, under male domination) had not only made a stately call at the Rectory, but had ostentatiously taken Archie for a drive through the village in their carriage, thus showing, publicly, to the country world what view was held by those high in authority of her conduct. The example was as contagious as royal favour shown unexpectedly to a half-suspected favourite.

The parson's daughter was one of the right sort—had come forward and helped Mr. Gerald through thick and thin; the parson's daughter was riding all the afternoon with the ladies of the Court. The leading parishioners came up, forthwith, with their wives and daughters, to call at the Rectory. Not only Archie herself, but Mr. Lovell and Bettina, clothing-club feuds forgotten, were vested with the interest of public characters; and on Sunday, as I have said, crowds of country people flocked in to Hatton church, eager to have a look at the down-cast girlish face in the parson's pew—the heroine, Archie Lovell.

Her triumph made the girl infinitely sad, infinitely humble. There was so wide a difference between the Archie Lovell whom the world called noble, and the weak, wavering, passion-tossed Archie Lovell whom she knew. If things had shaped themselves differently at this sharp turning-point of her life—if Ralph had forsaken her; if the people she lived amongst, instead of crowning her with laurel, had happened to consider her as lost—ten chances to one she would have hardened and

deteriorated down to the level assigned her. But success is the real touchstone of character, and Archie's stood the test beautifully. Four weeks ago she was a self-willed child, smoking her cigarettes, and defying Mrs. Maloney and the proprieties as she ran wild about the Morteville streets: a child suspecting no evil, and careless how she incurred its imputation. As she walked home on her father's arm from Hatton church to-day, she was a woman—softened by a sense of her own weakness, brought low and meek by the love which in her inmost heart she seemed so little to have deserved. In her hour of success every baser element was cast out from that fine nature, and all that remained, henceforth and for ever, was pure gold.

I don't think I need describe a double wedding that took place one soft October morning in Hatton church. How opinions varied as to whether the pensive fair face or the mignonne dark one looked best beneath its orange blossoms; how Bettina, afraid really to cry because of her lovely dress and

bonnet-strings, held her handkerchief to her eyes in delightful proximity to Lady Durant of Durant's Court; how Mr. Lovell, in his agitation, very nearly married the wrong people to each other; how Sholto M'Ivor, in returning thanks, as best man, for the bridesmaids, contrived in twenty incoherent words to condense together every embarrassing remark that could possibly be made on the subject of old loves and transferred affections. It is all a thing of the past now. The wedding took place more than a year ago, and the four people most interested know pretty well whether the adventure they made then in the great lottery is likely to turn out a prize or not.

Gerald Durant has left the army, and lives at Durant's Court with the old people. He is a good deal bored, but not more, he fondly tries to think, than he would be if he was going through his former mill-horse life of London and Paris dissipation. He keeps excellent hunters, has instituted a *chef* in the Court kitchen, already inclines ever so slightly to stoutness, and is not very much worried, save by his wife's occasional fits of jealousy about

Mrs. Seton and the persistency with which she sings long songs, always in the style of Mr. Bligh, of an evening. As years go by, he thinks, and as Lucia's baby-daughter grows old enough to require training, he will probably be less bored still; and in the meantime it is a great thing to have as pleasant a house to go to as Ludbrooke, a woman as charming as Mrs. Seton to leaven the whole dull mass of heavy county society.

Of the Setons, all I have to say is written in four words—four very rare words to be able to record of any two human beings—they suit each other! Half Mr. Lovell's time is spent at Ludbrooke. Troy hangs there—there was no good light for it in the parsonage, the poor fellow suddenly discovered, when Archie married—and of an evening he and his daughter stand before it still, talking in whispers, her hand within his arm, of the great poet and painter he may yet become, should fate prove a little kinder to his wishes.

I can fancy them talking just as foolishly when all the roses shall have died on Mrs. Seton's face, and when the blue eyes have grown dimmed, and

other affections, other cares, surround her in the years to come.

Women of weaker calibre can forget after they are married that they were daughters once. In a heart as loving and as large as Archie's, there will be no dethronements.

THE END.

MESSRS. TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW WORKS.

THE REGENCY OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA. By M. W. FREER, Author of "The Married Life of Anne of Austria," &c. In 2 vols. 8vo.

BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME CELEBRATED PEOPLE. By ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE. In 2 vols. [Ready.]

THE HISTORY OF FRANCE UNDER THE BOURBONS. By CHARLES DUKE YONGE, Author of "The History of the Royal Navy." In 2 vols. 8vo. [Ready.]

THE EASTERN HUNTERS. By Capt. JAMES NEWALL. 1 Vol. 8vo, with numerous Illustrations. [Ready.]

New Work suitable for Students and Schools.

A COURSE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. By JAMES HANNAY. 1 vol. [Ready.]

MODERN CHARACTERISTICS: a Series of Essays from the *Saturday Review*, revised by the Author. In 1 vol. handsomely printed, and bevelled boards. [Second and Revised Edition this day.]

THE RACE FOR WEALTH. By Mrs. J. H. RIDDELL, Author of "George Geith," &c. 3 vols. Reprinted from "Once a Week." [Ready.]

THE SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON. By PERCY FITZGERALD. Author of "Bella Donna," "Jenny Bell," &c. 3 vols. Reprinted from "All the Year Round." [Ready.]

New Novel by the Author of "East Lynne," &c.

ELSTER'S FOLLY. By Mrs. HENRY WOOD. 3 vols. [Ready.]

THE MAN OF MARK: a Novel. By the Author of "Richard Langdon." 3 vols. [Ready.]

THE CO-HEIRESS: a Novel. By the Author of "Charlie Nugent," and "St. Aubyns of St. Aubyn." [Shortly.]

KISSING THE ROD: a Novel. By EDMUND YATES, Author of "Running the Gauntlet." 3 vols. [Ready.]

WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO: a Novel. By the Author of "Altogether Wrong." In 3 vols. [Ready.]

LIZZIE LORTON OF GREYRIGG: a Novel. By Mrs. LYNN LINTON, Author of "Grasp your Nettle," "The Lake Country," &c. In 3 vols.

THREE HUNDRED A YEAR: a Novel. By the Hon. Mr. HENRY WEYLAND CHETWYND. In 2 vols.

New Edition, Revised, of Everyday Papers.

EVERYDAY PAPERS. Reprinted from "All the Year Round," and adapted for Evening Reading at Mechanics' Institutes, Penny Reading Clubs, &c. By ANDREW HALLIDAY. In 1 vol.

MESSRS. TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW WORKS.

CHEAP EDITIONS OF POPULAR WORKS.

- ST. MARTIN'S EVE. By the Author of "East Lynne,"
&c. 6s.
- SANS MERCI. By the Author of "Guy Livingstone,"
&c. 6s.
- MAXWELL DREWITT. By the Author of "The Race
for Wealth," &c. 6s.
- RUNNING THE GAUNTLET. By EDMUND YATES. 6s.
- GEORGE GEITH. By the Author of "Maxwell Drewitt,"
&c. 6s.
- MILDRED ARKELL. By the Author of "East
Lynne." 6s.
- HALF A MILLION OF MONEY. By the Author of
"Barbara's History," &c. [Nearly ready.
- TOO MUCH ALONE. By the Author of "City and
Suburb." 6s.
- CITY AND SUBURB. By the Author of "George
Geith," &c. 6s.
- THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH. By the Author of
"George Geith." 6s.
- TREVLYN HOLD. By the Author of "East Lynne,"
&c. 6s.
- MISS FORRESTER. By the Author of "The Morals of
Mayfair," &c. 6s.
- DENIS DONNE. By ANNIE THOMAS, Author of "Theo
Leigh." 6s.
- MAURICE DERING. By the Author of "Guy Living-
stone," &c. 6s.
- GUY LIVINGSTONE. By the Author of "Sword and
Gown," &c. 5s.
- BARREN HONOUR. By the Author of "Sword and
Gown," &c. 6s.
- BORDER AND BASTILLE. By the Author of "Maurice
Dering." 6s.
- SWORD AND GOWN. By the Author of "Guy Living-
stone." 4s. 6d.
- SEVEN SONS OF MAMMON. By GEORGE AUGUSTUS
SALA. 6s.
- RECOMMENDED TO MERCY. 6s.

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

